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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 20, 2008

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 20, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

ADDRESS IN REPLY DEBATE

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations between all parties and I seek unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, for the purpose of considering the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne of the First Session of the 40th Parliament, Standing Order 50 be amended as follows:

Section (4) be replaced with the following:

“(4) On the third of the said days, if a subamendment be under consideration at fifteen minutes before the end of the time provided for the Address debate, the Speaker shall interrupt the proceedings and forthwith put the question on the said subamendment”.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETITIONS

MONTREAL-TRUDEAU AIRPORT

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if my first bill is ever passed by this House, the name of my riding will be Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine—Dorval.

I am pleased to table this petition in the House. It is signed by residents of the areas surrounding Montreal-Trudeau airport, who wish to draw the attention of the House of Commons, Parliament, the assembly and the federal Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to the following:

The noise and pollution from the increasing number of night flights, which are exacerbating an already difficult situation, are having a negative impact on the quality of life of the residents of

Dorval, Lachine, Pointe-Claire, Cartierville-Saint-Laurent and other municipalities and districts in the western part of the island of Montreal. The petitioners ask for an immediate cessation of arrivals and departures to and from Montreal-Trudeau airport between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m., with the exception of those required for the following reasons: medical emergency, delays for reasons beyond the control of the carrier, poor atmospheric conditions, and flights directly linked to Canadian military operations.

I believe that the residents of areas surrounding the airport are right, and ask this House to support them.

[*English*]

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as members of the House know, the tremendous crime of human trafficking of women and children is rising in Canada. Hundreds of petitioners from across Canada call on the government to continue its good work in combatting and stopping human trafficking across our borders and across our country. These petitions keep coming into my office because the Canadian public is increasingly more aware and more concerned about this horrendous crime.

• (1010)

[*Translation*]

HEAVY TRUCK TRAFFIC

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in all the time I have been a member here, I have always tabled my petitions, so this is the first time I am introducing one in this way.

I attach great importance to it, because it is a petition signed by residents of Ottawa—Vanier and of other ridings on both sides of the river. The petition concerns the interprovincial bridges. People are opposed to the continuing heavy truck traffic in the heart of Canada's capital, a situation which makes their life difficult. They are also opposed to the proposal made by a consultant hired by the National Capital Commission to transfer part of this truck traffic to another area of established communities.

The petitioners therefore request that the Government of Canada require the National Capital Commission to carry out a thorough study of the option of a bridge between the Canotek industrial park to the Gatineau airport, which is option 7 in phase one of the environmental assessment of interprovincial connections.

I hope that the government will follow up on this constructive proposal by my fellow citizens.

The Address

[English]

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to have this opportunity to present a petition from thousands of Canadians. They remind the House of Commons that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known and yet Canada continues to be one of the largest producers of asbestos in the world and in fact spends millions of dollars subsidizing the industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

Therefore, these many petitioners argue that Canada should ban asbestos in all its forms, institute a just transition program for asbestos workers, end all government subsidies to asbestos both in Canada and abroad, and stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam convention.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I want to offer my congratulations to you on being re-elected as Speaker of the House. It is a tremendous honour, one which is very well deserved. I know all of my colleagues on this side of the House wish you well for the 40th Parliament.

With respect to routine proceedings, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[Translation]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from November 19 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today to provide the reply of the official opposition, the Liberal Party, to the Speech from the Throne that opened the 40th Parliament.

Allow me to begin by congratulating you, Mr. Speaker, on your election to the speakership of the House of Commons. I would also like to congratulate all members on having been elected to this Parliament. Setting aside our partisan differences, we can all agree that it is an honour to represent and serve our fellow citizens in this House. I would like to thank the voters of Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.) for having placed their trust in me once again.

For the third time in as many elections, Canadians decided to elect a minority government. Once again, therefore, the government must work with the opposition for this Parliament to function.

Canada's Liberal Party is experiencing a period of renewal across the country, and it intends to act responsibly in its role as official opposition in a minority Parliament. Yes, we will be a responsible opposition, and we will devote our efforts to making sure that this Parliament works for the good of all Canadians during this period of economic instability.

I am disappointed to see that the NDP and the Bloc have wasted no time getting involved in one-upmanship and threatening to trigger yet another election mere weeks after Canadians went to the polls. That would be irresponsible. Canadians expect better from us. They want all of us to work together in the House to strengthen our health care system, to better protect Canadians, not just build more jails, to seize the economic potential of the fight against climate change, and to make our environment healthier.

● (1015)

[English]

What this Parliament does not need is a government written manual for committee chairs instructing them how to disrupt the work of vital parliamentary committees. What this Parliament does not need is a government that attempts to manufacture confidence votes on bills that simply are not matters of confidence.

What this Parliament does need, though, is a government that would finally offer Canadians a plan to see us through the economic challenges that we face.

Demanding strong action from the government on the economy will be our primary task. While reviewing every government action we will ask three key questions. First, will the government proposals protect and create jobs? Second, is the government doing all that it can to safeguard Canadians' pensions and savings? Third, of course, are the government proposals fiscally responsible? Government proposals for the economy that meet these three tests will be supported by the official opposition.

It is high time the government actually unveiled a plan that would protect jobs, that would safeguard Canadians' pensions and savings. It is high time the government showed an ounce of fiscal responsibility.

While there is no doubt that the global economic downturn has had a significant impact on Canada, that impact has been made worse by the government's previous economic mismanagement.

Our economic downturn did not start last month. It started nearly a year ago. Canada had the worst performing economy of the G-8 for the first half of 2008. In fact, so far this year, our economy has actually shrunk. It has been our worst economic growth since 1991.

The Address

Our country's labour productivity is falling further and further behind the United States. Our productivity has fallen for nine months straight, something that Canada has not seen since 1990. With the fundamentals of our economy already weakened, Canada entered the escalating economic crisis with one hand tied behind its back. The government spin does not match its record. It did not anticipate this and did nothing to prevent it. Look at the economic projections last fall when it cut the GST. The projections were rosy, they were optimistic, they were wrong.

[*Translation*]

Canadian workers are the ones who suffer the consequences of this government's failure to act. Over the course of the government's time in office, we have seen a continual, steady, stream of jobs losses in many of our highest-paying industrial sectors, including manufacturing and forestry.

The government's response has been a combination of indifference and ideology. And most importantly, no strategy to strengthen economic development in the various regions of the country.

• (1020)

[*English*]

To take a key example, the government refused to invest in the auto sector, saying it would not pick winners and losers. That was until it knew an election was only a few days away. Then it changed its mind. Now the finance minister is changing his mind again, saying that he is talking to people on the street who are telling him not to invest in the auto sector. As the government wrestles with its indecision, our economy continues to struggle and Canadian workers are losing their jobs.

At present, with no clear proposals, the government is simply unable to answer the question of what it will do to give Canadians confidence in their jobs. It is clear that the government has more work to do to protect Canadian savings and pensions. I can say, though, that I am pleased that the Prime Minister is expressing a new willingness to work with the G-20.

When this organization was proposed by the previous Liberal government, in fact championed by Paul Martin, the current Prime Minister called it a weak nation strategy. He was wrong then and he would still be wrong not to take full advantage of the G-20, this good Canadian idea, this Canadian success story.

[*Translation*]

I am also pleased to see that the Prime Minister now no longer believes that the Liberal economic plan for the first 30 days is a sign of panic, as he did during the election campaign.

We are happy on this side of the House that the government has adopted our proposal to accelerate already budgeted infrastructure spending, to meet with private sector experts, to bring forth a swift economic update, and to finally, after two years, meet with the premiers of the provinces and territories to coordinate economic strategies for the federation.

[*English*]

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister showed up at that first ministers meeting with nothing besides a new cap on equalization payments in a desperate attempt to get his flailing budget under control. By effectively renouncing his equalization formula as unsustainable, he is renouncing the centrepiece of his 2007 budget, a budget that will go down in history as one of Canada's greatest missed opportunities.

I hope that when the Prime Minister looks at the economy today, he demonstrates more sensitivity and vision, and sees more than simply buying opportunities, especially because, looking at the TSX, anyone that took his advice on October 7 would have lost around 10% of the market by now.

[*Translation*]

The credit crisis is affecting some of the biggest employers in Canada. This crisis comes at the worst possible moment, at a time when the decline of the stock markets has significantly reduced the value of many companies' retirement funds. Fortunately, thanks to good management by previous Liberal governments, our public pension plan is on solid financial footing. Fortunately, Canada did not listen to the current Prime Minister when he was the Reform Party's economic adviser and recommended ending the Canada pension plan.

In fact, the Conservative government inherited from the Liberal government a pension plan, a banking system, sound economic and financial fundamentals unprecedented in the history of Canada. It took three years of Conservative government to squander that legacy. This throne speech, like the two before it, falsely give credit to the Conservative government for Liberal achievements.

If only the government were at least offering new solutions for today's problems. This government has to move beyond generalities and explain precisely how it intends to provide businesses with the flexibility they need to both stay in business and deliver the pensions that they owe to Canadian workers.

• (1025)

[*English*]

The bottom line is that in less than three years the government has destroyed the \$13 billion surplus that it inherited from the previous Liberal government. The government is now talking about a deficit. This deficit would not be the result of the global economic crisis. The Liberal government managed a surplus during the Asian financial crisis, after 9/11, and in the face of SARS. This deficit would be the responsibility of the Conservative government, of the finance minister, of the Prime Minister.

[*Translation*]

Who is responsible for this deficit? This Conservative government, this Minister of Finance, this Prime Minister.

The Address

[English]

It is the Conservative government that decided not to cut taxes in a way that would stimulate the economy and boost productivity. It is the Conservative government that became the highest spending government in Canadian history. The government earned that title in both 2007 and 2008. By the next fiscal year, the government is on track to have increased government spending by 25% from 2005-06. That is more than \$40 billion in new spending every year. The government may be Conservative but it is certainly not fiscally conservative.

[Translation]

This government is ideologically very conservative, but it is certainly not conservative in its management of public finances.

[English]

The government has been imprudent to the point of eliminating the contingency reserve that acted as a buffer, thus helping to keep Canada out of deficit during challenging economic times.

The Prime Minister said repeatedly during the election that he anticipated an economic downturn. If he saw it coming, why did he spend the surplus? More important, if he saw it coming, why did he spend the contingency reserve?

The government made the decision to leave no buffer, no room to manoeuvre, to ensure that in an economic downturn the Government of Canada would spend more money than it was bringing in, to ensure that in an economic downturn Canada would be in deficit.

Last month, the Prime Minister said that he would never run a deficit and that talk of a deficit was ridiculous. It is actually the government that looks ridiculous today.

During the election, the government misled Canadians about the possibility of a deficit. Now, with this throne speech, the government is trying to mislead Canadians about the cause of a deficit. It is the government's responsibility. It is the government's record.

[Translation]

The official opposition has a strong caucus and we will continue to question the government about its choices and its record.

We will do everything we can to protect the jobs, the pensions and the savings of Canadians. We will do everything we can to ensure that discipline is once again a fundamental principle in the budget.

That is what we are asking of Canadians in these difficult economic times. And that is what the official opposition intends to offer.

• (1030)

[English]

The official opposition does not intend to use this occasion to bring the government down. However, we do want to offer some advice and test the government's assurances of goodwill. To that end, using some of the Prime Minister's own words spoken in the House of Commons on October 6, 2004, when he was the leader of the opposition in a minority government, I move:

That the motion now before the House be amended by changing the period to a comma, and adding the following:

and we urge Your Excellency's advisors

to respect the results of the election in which more than 60 percent of voters supported members of Parliament in the opposition;

to bear in mind that people express their wishes as much through the opposition as through the government;

to recognize that Canadians rightfully expect the House of Commons they just elected to function in a less partisan, more constructive and collaborative manner, with the first responsibility for setting a better tone being that of the government which requires the government to be more forthcoming than it has been up to now;

to that end, given the crucial nature of the upcoming economic and fiscal update, to provide representatives of opposition parties with a detailed briefing by appropriate senior officials at least three hours in advance of the public presentation of the update, so all members of Parliament can be properly equipped to deal with the serious economic difficulties confronting Canadians.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the leader of the official opposition for his re-election. I thank him for his comments and his speech in response to the Speech from the Throne.

However, I sense a divided Liberal opposition when it comes to the matter of working in consultation and cooperation with the government as we all face this global economic crisis. I notice with some optimism that the Leader of the Opposition has stated for the record that he is willing to work with the government to try and provide economic relief for all Canadians. Yet, with some concern, I noted in an interview on *Mike Duffy Live* last night that the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore has said he has really no interest in working with the government in ways to find savings through the government's annual operating budget.

I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to state the official position of the official opposition party. Is it the words just spoken or is it the position of the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore, who has basically said he does not wish to work with the government to try and find savings or to try in any way to work collaboratively with the government to deal with this economic crisis? Could he please illuminate the official position of the official opposition party?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, it is the responsibility of the government to propose a plan, especially taking into account the fact that the government is the one that is completely responsible for the deficit. It mismanaged the economy over the last three years. It did nothing to prepare the country for the current economic crisis. It has the responsibility to propose a plan, to come with proposals, to be accountable, and to be transparent, not to come with ideological cuts that are announced by the office of the Prime Minister, but to come with proposals that are discussed by the elected members of this House. This is its responsibility and we will carry out our responsibility.

Speaking about a divided caucus, what can we say about the Minister of Finance, who said that in order to hide the deficit he is ready to sell the assets of Canada? The Prime Minister contradicted him the day after. Who is speaking for the government? I guess it is the Prime Minister. I hope it is the Prime Minister. I hope they will not come with this plan to try to hide the deficit by selling assets.

The Address

• (1035)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, millions of Canadians are waiting desperately for bold steps from the government. They are worried about their pensions, their savings and their jobs, and yet the throne speech contains nothing on a national public transit strategy, nothing on building affordable housing, no plan to create more child care spaces and nothing for the four out of five unemployed workers who cannot access employment insurance.

What I hear from the Leader of the Opposition is about what has occurred in past various governments. We have not heard any bold steps nor concrete suggestions. What I did hear was that the plan in the throne speech was ridiculous. If the speech is ridiculous and there is nothing bold or strategic for suffering Canadians, why is the Leader of the Opposition supporting this ridiculous plan he just spent 15 minutes saying that it is not worthy of support? I do not understand.

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that she would appear ridiculous going door to door in her riding next week asking her constituents to vote for her. She would appear completely ridiculous and she knows that. Her leader knows that as well. This is a game.

She is right about the lack of precision in dealing with pensions, jobs and savings but we need to keep Parliament working. She must ask these questions of the government and for all of us. That would not be possible if we were to go back to an election. All of us would appear ridiculous.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in reading the Speech from the Throne, there are a number of statements on which I am sure members could give speeches all by themselves. One statement is on page 15 of the English version where it states, allegedly, the position of the government. It reads:

Canada's institutions are the cornerstone of our democracy, our freedom and our prosperity.

However, I wonder if that is the view of Canadians after seeing what happened to the head of the Nuclear Safety Commission. I wonder what Canadians would think if they were asked about respect for Parliament and its legislation for fixed election dates. I wonder what they would think about the government challenging the authority of and voting non-confidence in the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada.

The Leader of the Opposition has been sued himself. I wonder if he believes, like I believe, that the government cannot be trusted at its word.

• (1040)

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, we have another example. A few weeks ago the Prime Minister said that there would be no deficit and now he is presenting a deficit.

How can we trust the government? The question is certainly relevant. The government said that it would have a new attitude, a new mood and that it would have a cooperative approach. We will take it at its word and see if that is the case.

The official opposition will do its job. We will keep the government accountable. We will ask for more transparency, We

will ask for a plan to help our pensions, our savings, our jobs, and to ask for respect for the officials of this country who are not partisan and should not be considered partisan each time they give advice to the government that it does not like.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member's comments with interest. Perhaps he lives in a bubble and is not aware of what is going on globally right now.

I would like to know if he could make a couple of simple acknowledgements for members of the House. Would he acknowledge that Canada is the only G-8 nation that is currently running an operating surplus, paying down debt and reducing taxes? Would he acknowledge that over 800,000 jobs have been created since January 23, 2006? Would he acknowledge that consumer demand in Canada remains robust? The auto industry in Canada is a great example. Its sales were up 1.4% in October of this year over October of last year.

That is the record of this government and the effect of economic stimulus in the economy. At the same time, the U.S. demand is off some 50% in the automotive industry.

Would the member acknowledge that those are the global issues that we are seeing?

He cannot really talk about things in isolation. He cannot live in a bubble like his speech indicated, which is that we can somehow isolate Canada and look at these things in isolation. It really seems like he is ignoring so many of the global problems.

Would the member acknowledge the outstanding record of this government on so many fronts because his speech did not?

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, I will acknowledge that we had a strong economy in the past, thanks to the hard work of Canadians and sound Liberal policies over a decade.

It was foreseeable that one day an economic crisis would come from abroad. We are not in isolation. We were not in isolation when we had SARS. We were not in isolation when we had 9/11. We prepared the country for that.

Why did the Prime Minister get rid of the contingency reserve of \$3 billion? There was no reason for that except mismanagement on the part of the Conservative government. I am not alone in saying that. I will read what the parliamentary budget officer wrote:

The weak fiscal performance to date is largely attributable to previous policy decisions as opposed to weakened economic conditions...

The Conservative government is responsible for this deficit and it has the responsibility to come up with a plan, a plan that we want to see as soon as possible, which is why we want this Parliament to continue to work.

*The Address**[Translation]*

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Thank you Mr. Speaker for the opportunity to reply to the Speech from the Throne, delivered yesterday by Her Excellency the Governor General.

[English]

I would like to begin by congratulating you once again, Mr. Speaker, on your re-election as Speaker and, through you, I would like to also congratulate all members of the House of Commons on their re-election.

I would also, in particular, like to thank the people of Calgary for electing me to the House of Commons for the fifth time. I have now been returned for the riding of Calgary Southwest four times in just a little over six years. Calgary is, in so many ways, a remarkable community. Dare I say that there are few like it where a young man with neither roots nor connections could have been given the opportunities I have been given and I am deeply thankful for these. In particular, I thank the people of Calgary Southwest for the enormous latitude they have given me to travel around this country and others while remaining their local representative.

Of course we are all here because of the election of October 14. Nearly 15 million Canadians voted in our 40th general election. In doing so, they were performing their civic duty, expressing their hopes for the country and leaving their mark on our shared history and destiny.

I am honoured that Canadians chose to give our government another and strengthened mandate. It is often difficult for incumbent governments to receive strengthened mandates but it is rare, indeed, to receive a stronger mandate during difficult economic times. However, that is precisely what happened in the election.

Our Conservative government, while still a minority, now has one of the broadest and most balanced mandates from across the country of governments elected in the past generation. We have moved beyond the time where governments swept huge regions entirely while being virtually shut out in other huge parts of the country. This is reflected in the breadth and depth of talent in our new caucus and cabinet.

● (1045)

[Translation]

If you will indulge a hockey analogy, Mr. Speaker, the core of experienced veterans on our cabinet team has been strengthened by the addition of several impressive rookies. This has given our line-up balance, with ministers from 10 of the 13 provinces and territories and, as well, we have one of the largest proportions of female cabinet ministers in Canadian history.

[English]

This representative breadth of our government has also been bolstered by a marked increase in our support among new Canadians from our country's vast array of cultural communities. The government will continue to build a peaceful, prosperous and pluralistic country where everyone enjoys equal opportunities to get ahead, where healthy families flourish in safe communities, where reward for individual initiative is balanced with collective commit-

ment to helping people in need and where different faiths, languages and traditions all contribute to our rich cultural heritage.

Just as Canadians are a people who have come from different and sometimes antagonistic backgrounds and yet have managed to create one of the most harmonious societies on earth, so we as their representatives should resolve to put aside clearly partisan considerations and try, wherever possible, to work cooperatively for the benefit of Canada. This would not only serve to reinvigorate this chamber, it would also help us deal with the enormous challenges that confront Canada as a part of the global economy; challenges that have only grown since our election concluded just five short weeks ago.

Indeed, if there has been a silver lining to the global economic crisis, it has been the desire of governments thus far to come together in pursuit of common solutions. I have seen this in my meetings with our premiers and the world witnessed it at the unprecedented G-20 leaders summit held in Washington this past weekend.

[Translation]

If we can come to some consensus among the diverse governments of the world, many of whom have had long-standing and intractable conflicts, surely we can work more productively and cooperatively here within a single Parliament.

[English]

The Government of Canada is very pleased with the positions taken at the G-20 summit. There is a common understanding of the macroeconomic measures necessary to respond to a slowing global economy. There is an action plan for better national regulation of financial institutions and markets with transparent international assessments of countries' financial sectors and there is an endorsement of free and open economic policies with an explicit rejection of the temptations of protectionism.

That these positions are so close to those of Canada is not surprising. First, they reflect Canada's economic values: open trade and free markets, governed by prudent policy and sound regulation. We have long avoided the extremes of either protectionist economics on the one hand or ungoverned markets on the other, that, whatever their appeal, invariably leads to heartbreak for businesses, consumers and workers alike.

Second, they reflect Canada's position in the world today, particularly our relative strength among developed economies.

I will just review some of those strengths and I will quote no less an authority than the world economic forum, the world's soundest banking system. We have, thanks to prudent financial management in recent years, the strongest fiscal position of any of the major industrialized countries.

● (1050)

[Translation]

In less than three years, our government has paid down \$37 billion on the national debt. That has given us the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio in the G-7, which means we have greater fiscal flexibility than most other nations.

The Address

[English]

Taxes have been cut across the board: sales taxes, income taxes, business taxes and further tax cuts are built into our fiscal framework. Furthermore, our public pensions are actuarially sound and our government has increased social benefits to bolster the financial security of Canadian households, such as through the creation of the universal child care benefit, bolstered transfers to provincial programs of health and post-secondary education, and enhancement of the guaranteed income supplement.

[Translation]

These measures have been helping Canadians live within their means instead of beyond their means, as has occurred in so many other countries.

[English]

Nevertheless, as I have said, Canada is in a position of only relative strength in the global economy, and the global economy is entering a period that world leaders have concluded is as dire as anything we have faced in many decades. We have been affected and we will be further affected, particularly given that our closest neighbour and largest trading partner is at the epicentre of the financial earthquake and global slowdown.

[Translation]

The collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market in the United States set off shockwaves around the world, paralyzed international credit markets, caused bank failures in New York and London and financial crises in countries like Iceland and Hungary, and resulted in extreme gyrations in stock and commodity markets, and plummeting consumer spending in the hardest-hit countries, including the U.S.

[English]

As a consequence, our investments have suffered, our property values have softened, and some of our export markets have already contracted, but ever since this crisis began over a year ago, we have been moving decisively to counteract its effects. Our early fiscal stimulus in the form of long-term reductions in consumer, personal, and business taxes has bolstered domestic spending and improved our attractiveness for investment. Our legislation strengthening the Bank of Canada's ability to provide liquidity for our domestic credit markets has been essential, and to guard against the U.S.-style real estate implosion, we acted to limit mortgage terms and to establish minimum down payments.

[Translation]

Due to these actions, when the global crisis deepened this fall, Canada has been able to avoid some of the riskier and more expensive actions other governments were forced to take.

For example, we have not had to spend billions of dollars to buy into or bail out crumbling financial institutions. Instead, in Canada we have maintained stability through carefully targeted commercial interventions designed to preserve the inherent strength of our banking sector and to help it maintain liquidity and provide credit.

[English]

Our commitment to purchase insured mortgages through the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation has ensured that our

financial institutions would keep lending to individuals and businesses. Our new Canadian Lenders Assurance Facility created the confidence needed to facilitate continued interbank lending. These actions have been very helpful in the financial sector, as have the monitoring policy actions undertaken by the Bank of Canada, often in coordination with other countries.

At the same time, some of these actions are unprecedented; indeed, we would probably not have considered some of them even a short time ago.

• (1055)

[Translation]

And it become very clear at the G-20 summit that further actions, possibly including further unprecedented actions, may be necessary.

[English]

It is becoming apparent that financial and monetary actions may not be sufficient to deal with the present crisis. Already governments around the world have been responding with large budgetary actions, and we will see many more. China has announced a half-trillion dollar package to bolster domestic spending; the United Kingdom and the United States, though already deeply in deficit, are moving ahead with additional fiscal stimulus.

In short, world governments have resolved that they will undertake whatever financial, monetary and budgetary measures are necessary to cope with the crisis, and, let me be clear, this is also the position of the Government of Canada.

We will undertake whatever short-term fiscal measures are necessary to be part of a global economic solution to a global economic problem. We will do so while ensuring that our country's fundamental strengths and competitive advantages are still in place when the turmoil subsides.

To that end, it is critically important that we avoid returning to the structural deficits that so handicapped Canada during the middle and late 20th century. Twenty-seven consecutive years of annual federal deficits led our government to the brink of national insolvency. Fortunately, in the 1990s a bipartisan consensus developed here and in virtually all of our provincial governments that such structural deficits had to be eliminated. This strong fiscal framework has allowed us to act early in this crisis and to keep our economy stronger thus far than has been the case in other industrialized nations.

[Translation]

Once again, I think we can all agree that balancing the budget by raising taxes, by cutting essential government activity or by refusing necessary intervention in the midst of a global economic crisis would be a cure worse than the disease. We will have to act in the months to come while clearly ensuring that Canada does not return to ongoing or structural deficits.

*The Address**[English]*

Once again, I think we can all agree that balancing the budget by raising taxes, by cutting essential government activity, or by refusing necessary intervention in the midst of a global economic crisis would be a cure worse than the disease. We will have to act in the months to come to clearly ensure that Canada does not return to ongoing or structural deficits.

The Minister of Finance will provide greater assessment and detail in his economic and fiscal statement next week during this debate on the Speech from the Throne, but I will mention the essential elements.

We will conduct a thorough strategic review of all departmental program spending plans for the next four years, and in fact the President of the Treasury Board began this process a year and a half ago.

All grants, contributions and capital expenditures will be scrutinized carefully with a view to streamlining operations, making service delivery more efficient and saving taxpayers money.

All departments and agencies will be required to produce detailed quarterly financial statements accessible to parliamentarians and the public so that expenditures are subject to regular ongoing scrutiny.

All crown corporations and assets will also be subjected to strategic review to ensure they are still providing essential services to Canadians.

Public service compensation costs will be held in check.

● (1100)

[Translation]

In keeping with our commitment to fiscal balance, the Canada health transfer and Canada social transfer to the provinces will continue to grow as planned on a principled, sustainable basis. Equalization payments will also grow at a sustainable rate tied to the overall growth of our economy.

[English]

In addition to the budgetary measures we will take in the form of both long-term savings and short-term fiscal stimulus, our government is committed to actions that will stimulate investment, help workers and businesses adapt to rapidly changing markets at home and abroad, and create new and better job opportunities for Canadians. Some of these measures were laid out in our election platform and will be pursued over the course of our mandate.

To encourage investment specifically in our uranium mining and airline sectors, we will raise the threshold for foreign investment reviews. We will negotiate reciprocal treatment for Canadian businesses with our trading partners, while retaining the right to block foreign investment if it jeopardizes national security.

[Translation]

To stimulate investment and employment in the automotive and aerospace sectors, our government will increase funding for the automotive innovation fund and the strategic aerospace and defence initiative.

[English]

We are watching developments very carefully in the automotive sector, both here and south of the border. Any intervention by Canada will only be done if it is in the overall interest of the Canadian economy and if it is in sufficient regard for the interests of Canadian taxpayers.

To ensure that all our manufacturers continue to transform in a competitive global economy, we have already provided accelerated tax writeoffs for investments in machinery and equipment. We will also reduce tariffs on imported machinery and equipment.

We will also continue to support and encourage private sector research, development and commercialization of new products and innovations through our national science and technology strategy. For example, we will make further investments in Waterloo's Institute for Quantum Computing, an emerging world leader in the areas of computer, engineering, mathematical and physical sciences.

[Translation]

As well, while investing in the industries and jobs of tomorrow, our government is supporting the traditional industries that have long formed the sturdy foundation of Canada's economy. In some sectors and regions, those industries have been buffeted by a perfect storm of currency fluctuation, declining demand and increased foreign competition. One-industry communities have been particularly hard hit, and our government has responded with funding that supports local economic diversification, employment retraining and assistance for older workers.

[English]

However, there is more we can do to support traditional industries.

For the mining sector, we will extend the mineral exploration tax credit.

For the forestry sector, we will extend support for international marketing efforts and provide incentives to create energy from biomass.

For agriculture, we will invest in slaughterhouse capacity across Canada, maintain support for supply-managed sectors, and continue to champion marketing freedom for western Canadian grain farmers.

In our globalized economy, no country can escape international downturns altogether.

[Translation]

During such periods, governments have a duty to help families and communities bridge the gap between downturn and recovery.

*The Address**[English]*

It is also our duty to ensure that when a downturn occurs, Canada is last in, least affected, and first out. Our government has already taken numerous measures to achieve the first two objectives. To achieve the third, we are investing in the national infrastructure and economic development that will carry us to recovery.

[Translation]

Our Building Canada plan is the most ambitious infrastructure renewal effort in half a century. It involves roads, bridges, ports, border crossings, water treatment facilities airports and much more, in communities large and small from coast to coast. The federal and provincial governments will be working to accelerate these investments over the coming year.

We are also working to complete Canada's broadband Internet network, so Canadians in rural communities will have equal access to cyberspace.

[English]

As well, to further ensure equal opportunities for all Canadians, our government will restore the funding to Canada's three major regional economic development agencies, funding that was cut by our predecessors.

We will also make federal regional development funding available for the first time to communities with high unemployment in southern Ontario. We will establish a new agency dedicated to the economic development of Canada's far north, our magnificent Arctic frontier that holds such incredible potential to fuel our future prosperity.

To be at the forefront of recovery, Canada needs a healthy small business sector and skilled labour force. Our government will unleash the entrepreneurial energy and creativity of our country by further raising their tax thresholds and by indexing their lifetime capital gains exemptions to inflation.

With the resumption of Parliament, we will continue to implement the federal paper burden reduction initiative for small and medium size businesses. We will establish a venture capital fund that will help entrepreneurs get new products off the drawing board and into the marketplace.

● (1105)

[Translation]

Furthermore, we will assist young entrepreneurs with families by increasing their access to maternity and parental leave benefits through the employment insurance system.

[English]

Skilled tradesmen and women are already in short supply in some sectors and regions, so our government is taking action to ensure that Canada has the workers we need to fill the jobs of today and tomorrow. We have provided tax deductions and credits for apprentices and the companies that hire them. Next we will introduce cash bonuses for apprentices who complete their training programs.

[Translation]

We are also tackling the massive backlog in our immigration system by prioritizing applicants with the skills our economy needs immediately and by working with the provinces to ensure that the credentials of skilled immigrants are recognized across Canada.

[English]

There are other fronts on which we need to act with our provinces and territories. Our government will push forward a national effort to produce a strong agreement on internal economic union by 2010 in order to reduce interprovincial trade barriers, improve labour mobility and increase investment.

We also intend to press for a common securities regulator, as demanded by much of our business community. The Hockin report will be released no later than January, and we are pleased that virtually all provinces are open to examining its proposals.

The same principles, open and well regulated markets will guide our efforts to expand Canada's international trade relations. We are especially looking forward to working with the new administration in Washington, to strengthen the deep bonds of friendship and cooperation with our good neighbour and largest trading partner.

We will work closely to ensure our mutual protection while seeking to limit any obstacles to trade and travel undertaken in the name of U.S. national security. We will also emphasize that assured access of Canadian energy to U.S. markets is essential for the Americans' own security.

We have a real opportunity to work with the new American administration on an economically balanced North American strategy for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

We will not put all of our eggs in one basket.

[Translation]

Our government will urge Parliament to quickly ratify trade agreements we have concluded with the European Free Trade Association, Peru, Colombia and Jordan. We will also actively pursue new trade and investment agreements in Asia, the Americas and Europe. And we will continue expanding our network of overseas trade offices in countries such as China, Mongolia, Mexico, Brazil and India, developing countries whose economies continue to have healthy levels of economic growth.

[English]

Throughout Canada's history our economic growth and prosperity has often been disproportionately driven by a handful of commodities. At various times fish, fur, timber and wheat were primary sources of our national wealth. Today for the foreseeable future energy is a major driver of our economy.

[Translation]

Globally, we are first in hydroelectricity production, first in uranium production, third in natural gas production and fifth in overall energy production, with the second largest oil reserves in the world.

*The Address**[English]*

We are poised to tap the enormous energy reserves in the Arctic and to build the pipelines that will deliver it to markets across this continent. We have the raw material and potential to join the worldwide renaissance in the production of clean, safe nuclear power.

● (1110)

[Translation]

We will also increase production of clean energy, including ensuring that we generate 90 percent of our electricity from non-emitting sources by 2020. We will invest billions of dollars in renewable energy sources, including biofuels, wind, solar, geothermal and tidal power.

[English]

We will insist on upgrading raw bitumen in Canada before sending it for upgrading to countries with less stringent emission standards than our own.

To this point, my reply to the Speech from the Throne is focused on our plan to protect Canada and Canadians from the turmoil in the global economy.

[Translation]

But our government understands that Canadians also want us to take action on a broad range of other issues, and we intend to do so over the course of our new mandate.

[English]

Just as we are protecting Canada's economic security, we are taking action to protecting the health and safety of Canadians. This includes action on food and product safety, health care, safe streets and communities and protecting our national sovereignty and security. Canadians want assurance that the food, drugs and consumer products they buy are safe for their families.

[Translation]

Our government will reintroduce new food and consumer product safety measures that will provide for more inspection, testing and recall provisions for food, drugs, toys and other consumer products.

[English]

We will also launch an independent investigation of the listeriosis outbreak this past August and we will implement the food safety action plan, which will provide the Canada Food Inspection Agency with the necessary personnel and resources to improve safety systems.

[Translation]

Our government will also take further steps to improve Canada's health care system, including initiatives that will help increase recruitment and retention of doctors and nurses. And we will launch national strategies within our federal jurisdiction to specifically tackle lung and neurological diseases.

[English]

Serious and violent crime is obviously a threat and growing concern to Canadian families and communities. Our government has

already instituted numerous criminal justice reforms to restore the primacy of the rights of law-abiding citizens and to make our streets and communities safer. However, more must be done to deal with the intersection of guns, gangs and drugs, the main sources of violent crime.

Our government will end house arrest for those convicted of serious crimes such as robbery, arson, impaired driving causing death and kidnapping. We will introduce legislation to target violent crimes committed by criminal gangs. We will also deliver on our commitment to reform the youth criminal justice system.

[Translation]

Young people who are at risk of wandering off the path of law-abiding citizenship deserve our compassion and support. And our government will increase funding to help prevent at-risk youth from falling into the criminal lifestyle.

[English]

However, Canadians deserve protection from anyone who commits violent and repeat crimes and we will reform the young offenders legislation to achieve this objective.

We will also uphold our commitment to end the long gun registry, which is not only wasteful but has served to target law-abiding Canadians, especially rural Canadians, instead of dealing with gun crime.

The federal government has no greater duty than to protect our national sovereignty and security. For generations the Canadian Forces have proudly and honourably upheld this duty at home and abroad. Our government will continue to implement the Canada first defence strategy, our long-term plan to ensure our brave men and women in uniform have the resources they need to protect our security at home and to project our values abroad.

As it has been since 2001, the NATO-led UN sanctioned mission to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan will be our primary overseas deployment. We have made tremendous contributions at tremendous cost to the Afghanistan mission. As Parliament resolved earlier this year, we will continue to transform Canada's engagement in Afghanistan to focus on reconstruction and development in preparation for the end of the military mission in 2011.

● (1115)

[Translation]

Canada will also continue working for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law around the world. To that end, our government will establish an independent agency to promote international democratic governance. And we will proceed with our planned increases to foreign aid, including our commitment to double aid to Africa this year.

*The Address**[English]*

Our government is also committed to ensuring our sovereignty over Canada's Arctic. We will continue working to assert our jurisdiction over the lands and waters of our Arctic Archipelago under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. We will also expand our jurisdiction over the region under the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act and require mandatory notification of any foreign vessels entering Canadian territorial waters.

As well, we will proceed with a new polar class icebreaker named in honour of our late Prime Minister John George Diefenbaker.

Further, by the same logic that we need to control and protect our offshore waters, our government will move to protect our precious inland fresh waters. Therefore, we will introduce legislation to ban all bulk water transfers or exports of water from Canada's freshwater basins.

[Translation]

We Canadians are blessed to live in a mature, time-tested democracy. But as I said at the outset of my remarks today, we need to work together as parliamentarians to ensure the effectiveness of our democratic process.

[English]

Our political institutions and rules should be modernized in order to be relevant and credible in today's world. Our government will once again give Parliament the opportunity to act on Senate reform by reintroducing legislation that will set fixed terms for senators and give voters a say in their selection.

Our government will also ensure that growing provinces like Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta receive representation in the House of Commons that more fairly reflects their increased populations.

Building on the sweeping initiatives of our first mandate to take corporations, unions and big money out of political party and candidate financing, we will also be reintroducing legislation to prevent candidates for federal political office from receiving large private loans on a non-commercial basis.

[Translation]

We will reduce the number of appointees to federal boards, agencies, commissions and crown corporations, in concert with reforming the selection process. Finally, we will continue to constrain the use of the federal spending power and focus our efforts on improving our own areas of jurisdiction.

[English]

Our government has received a mandate for the agenda it will place before this Parliament, but our most urgent and pressing task will be to act pragmatically, carefully and expeditiously in dealing with the global economic crisis and the risks it presents for our country. The evolving nature of the crisis will condition our response and I invite members of all parties to provide constructive input into shaping that response. However, whatever the situation, I have no doubt that Canada will rise to this challenge.

[Translation]

Throughout its long history, Canada has been tested many times by economic and political upheaval that erupted in other parts of the world. Each time, our country has faced those challenges and emerged stronger than before.

[English]

In the midst of today's global economic crisis we are looking at a future with unprecedented uncertainty, but we can say that few countries are better prepared or better endowed to deal with it. When the world comes to the Olympics here in Vancouver and Whistler in just a little over a year, it will see a remarkable country. Canada's economy, like Canada's people, is durable and resilient. We are blessed with an incomparable abundance of natural resources. We have a hard-working and highly educated labour force that can adapt to a modern economy and our country is strong, compassionate and outward looking.

● (1120)

[Translation]

Working together, Canadians will overcome the current economic challenges and our great country of compassion and openness will come through this period of global economic instability stronger than ever.

[English]

If we ourselves pledge to work together in the service of this country, I have no doubt that we will emerge from these troubled times stronger, better and more united than ever before.

[Translation]

Let us protect, all together, our families and our future.

[English]

God bless the true north strong and free.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by congratulating the Prime Minister on his re-election.

I would also like to remind the Prime Minister that it was he who appointed Mr. Kevin Page as our dispassionate and independent Parliamentary Budget Officer. This is significant, because Mr. Page came out with a report this morning which leaves the Prime Minister absolutely nowhere to hide in terms of direct and personal responsibility for Canada's impending budget deficit, the first in more than a decade.

On page 16 of his report, Mr. Page wrote, "The weak fiscal performance to date"—that means a deficit is coming—"is largely attributable to previous policy decisions"—that means actions by the government—"as opposed to weakened economic conditions"—that means the global economic crisis.

The Address

In black and white, the Prime Minister's own appointee has said that our impending deficits, and he says we will be in deficit for at least the next two years, is due to actions taken by the government and not to a deteriorating global economy or Canadian economy. These are actions like reckless spending increases by the finance minister, to the point where he is the biggest spender in Canadian history; the erosion of the tax base; and, worst of all, the spending of Canada's contingency reserve, which is our safeguard against going back into deficit.

Would the Prime Minister admit, coming from his own appointee, Kevin Page, that he has no longer anywhere to hide, that the deficit is not the fault of the international community, and that he and his reckless finance minister are the sole proprietors of Canada's deficit?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I also will begin by personally congratulating the member for Markham—Unionville on his own re-election to the House of Commons.

First, I think we need to correct the facts. There are numerous prognostications about the future. The Minister of Finance will deliver his fiscal update in the week to come and that will provide the facts to all members of Parliament. However, let us be clear on what the facts are today.

Canada remains in surplus and, indeed, is one of the very few industrialized countries in the world to do so. This government undertook last year, as this crisis began, to act earlier than most other countries, by engaging in long-term fiscal stimulus both on the tax side and in infrastructure investments. We make no apologies for those actions. Those actions deliberately reduced the size of the surplus. As the hon. member who was once an esteemed economist knows, at a time of an economic downturn the government puts activity into the economy; it does not horde it in the government itself. That is what this government did. We did it earlier, whereas other countries are doing it later. They are already in deficit. They are increasing their deficits. In many cases they have structural deficits.

This government will act further in concert with our G-20 partners to ensure there is a global aggregate demand in the world. We will do so in a way that maintains a structural balance in this country. We will undertake some short-term economic stimulus. At the same time, we will undertake long-term savings to ensure that we do not go into structural deficit.

To the extent that the Liberal Party is critical of increases in spending, I would hope that means that in this Parliament the Liberal Party will cease to urge this government to spend more on everything. In fact, I would expect that the Liberal Party will be coming forward with specific suggestions for savings following its own electoral platform which said that the Liberals could find \$12 billion in federal savings. As I said to the Leader of the Opposition, I look forward to the Liberal Party's advice.

• (1125)

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would agree that we are in a period of economic and financial turmoil. I think it is important to invest taxpayers' money prudently at this time.

I wish to make a connection between the Speech from the Throne and the current rejuvenation of the Canadian armed forces. The Prime Minister just mentioned it again in his speech. We have some extremely important thoughts on the subject. First of all, does the Prime Minister realize that, before updating or purchasing anything, what we need is a foreign affairs policy? A defence policy would also be necessary.

We believe that "Canada first" is not a defence strategy. It is merely a shopping list that the government has put on the table. We could convey our negative reaction to the throne speech and the \$6 billion allocated to aerospace contracts, for example. I would remind the Prime Minister that 55% of Canada's aerospace industry is in Quebec. The Prime Minister needs to think about that.

Those contracts are awarded through an untendered bidding process and American companies are the ones that walk away with our money. There are practically no economic spinoffs here, least of all in Quebec. The problem is that the \$16 billion will not generate any economic spinoffs in Quebec.

It is up to the government to do so. It is the government that awards the contracts. It must impose its conditions and stipulate how they must be carried out. It does this in the auto sector. It does this everywhere, except in the aerospace sector in Quebec. The free market runs its course and Quebec loses contracts. This is unacceptable.

I am asking the Prime Minister if he will insist that a majority of aerospace contracts, that is, 55%, be given back to Quebec.

Will he let go of his laissez-faire ideology? It is important for Quebec to have its fair share, specifically, 55% of the contracts. The Prime Minister must abandon his laissez-faire ideology and impose these conditions in order to give Quebec its fair share of contracts.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the hon. member's information. There are important principles behind the Canada first defence strategy including, first of all, the defence of our country and its three oceans, the shared defence of North America with the U.S., and the capacity to cooperate with the international community and all parts of the world.

The procurement list is part of our Canada first defence strategy to ensure that we can continue to rebuild the Canadian Forces after decades of neglect. We must also ensure that we have the capacity required to move forward with all our commitments and objectives.

As for the purchase of equipment, this government adheres to the tendering process, which guarantees the best price and quality for Canadian taxpayers and the Canadian Forces. Our policy is to provide economic spinoffs for all parts of the country based on criteria that are not political, that is, the criteria of the market. This government will continue to upgrade equipment and ensure that all parts of the country, including Quebec, reap the benefits.

• (1130)

[English]

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, congratulations on your election and also to the right hon. Prime Minister for deciding to sit with his caucus on my side of the House. I appreciate that.

The Address

The constituents in the west end of my riding, around Emo, will be very pleased to hear that the Prime Minister said this morning that he is going to help build an abattoir in Emo. That was distinctly said and I will certainly pass that on to my constituents.

Unfortunately, however, we did not hear anything about forestry. I think forestry was mentioned but once and with no explanations. There was no strategy to help mills in Fort Frances and Barwick keep operating. There was no strategy to help reopen the closed mills in Sapawe and in and around Thunder Bay. I am hoping that in the days to come we will hear something more concrete from the right hon. Prime Minister.

Another glaring absence and something which is particularly important for northwestern Ontario is infrastructure money. It is certainly missing. The Prime Minister was talking about old money for infrastructure. Where is the new money for infrastructure?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, as the Speech from the Throne committed yesterday, the government will act to increase slaughterhouse capacity in this country. That was made clear yesterday.

In terms of the forestry sector, this government has been undertaking some important initiatives, including investment incentives not just in forestry but across manufacturing to help improve competitiveness and allow the transformation of these industries.

We also launched the billion dollar community development trust in collaboration with all of the provincial and territorial governments in this country with the express desire that the money be targeted toward forestry communities in particular.

We also are looking at innovative ways to encourage the development of biomass energy from forestry products.

In terms of infrastructure, the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River is relatively new to the House and I congratulate him on his election, but he will no doubt be informed by his colleagues that this government has already undertaken the largest infrastructure investments in this country in over half a century.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first of all I wish to congratulate each and every member on their victories in the last election. I would also like to thank the voters of Laurier—Sainte-Marie who elected me for the seventh consecutive time.

We have all savoured the joy of victory and the time has now come to carry out to the fullest our very important responsibilities. These are times of crisis and our constituents are counting on us. There are times in political life, particularly in a minority Parliament, where ideology and a lack of openness are decidedly out of place. These are such times. The circumstances demand that we focus our efforts on the needs of the people.

Therefore, it is with a sense of urgency, and also a desire for openness, that the Bloc Québécois begins this Parliament. We announced in advance that we intend to take a constructive approach and we made certain proposals for the Speech from the Throne. The

Bloc Québécois was quite prepared to compromise. It is possible to do so without renouncing the principles on which we were elected.

Unfortunately, this openness and feeling of urgency are missing from the Speech from the Throne the Conservatives have given us, as a result of three factors: first, the Prime Minister continues to be completely insensitive to the effects of the crisis on Canadians and on the economy; second, the Conservatives have learned nothing from the outcome of the last election in Quebec; and third, this throne speech looks like the last Conservative Party convention, that is, it is grounded in conservative ideology. The Bloc Québécois will therefore have no choice but to oppose passage of this throne speech.

As I said, we are going through some very serious crises. Already, hundreds of thousands of people have lost their jobs in recent months, particularly in the manufacturing and forestry sectors. Some people are very worried. I am thinking in particular of retirees who have seen their savings disappear, workers in the forestry industry who are seeing their plants close down, one by one, workers in the manufacturing industry who too are seeing their co-workers lose their jobs by the tens of thousands. We are in a crisis, and the federal government has a decisive role to play in supporting people and the economy, and it has the resources to do that.

This was not the case in the past. I was elected for the first time in 1990, a year marked by a major economic recession. The unemployment rate in Quebec climbed to 13% in 1993. People experienced a great deal of hardship at the time. In the early 1990s, public finances were in a deplorable state, and governments were left with less leeway. In 1993, the federal government generated a \$39 billion deficit, representing 31% of budget revenue.

The government's primary responsibility, as we enter this crisis, is to make sure that people do not suffer too badly from this economic situation. The government must do what it can with the resources available to it, and this time it has considerable resources. Since 1998, the government has generated surpluses of over \$100 billion. Restoring public finances and achieving these huge surpluses came at the price of the considerable sacrifices people had to make. It is now time to put these vast financial resources to work for the people who created them, to use them in the service of the public.

I would point out that the government has financial assets—I am not talking about federal buildings—amounting to tens of billions of dollars. I would also point out that the government is in a position to achieve major savings in its spending on bureaucracy, without laying anyone off, and that it can and must eliminate the tax breaks granted to the big oil companies and tighten the rules that for too long have allowed the wealthiest people to take advantage of tax havens.

● (1135)

The federal government has tremendous financial means at its disposal; failing to use those means in a time of crisis would be crazy. The federal government has a critical role to play in supporting people and the economy in times of crisis.

The Address

The government has the financial and legislative means to act decisively. Unfortunately, the will to do so was not expressed in the throne speech. It is sad to see such a lack of leadership. In light of the tremendous determination of governments in Europe, the United States and China, and their will to act, it is sad to see this government's pathological timidity and blatant lack of sensitivity.

It was the government's job to be clear about its desire to provide a workable plan to support businesses in the forestry and manufacturing sectors. That is a priority for Quebec and its regions. Instead, we got vague promises.

Thousands of workers have already lost their jobs in the forestry sector, yet the government is bent on staying its disastrous course. That sends a terrible message to thousands of workers, communities and regions that rely on the forestry industry: "You are on your own." That is unacceptable.

We are not asking the government to throw money out the window. We are asking it to do its part by introducing intelligent, substantive measures that will enhance our economy's productivity—measures that will enable Quebec's economy and Canada's economy to save and create jobs and to emerge stronger from this crisis.

Such measures include loans and loan guarantees for the purchase of new production equipment for the forestry and manufacturing sectors and refundable tax credits for research and development.

We will soon be making new, concrete, costed proposals. We are ready to debate our proposals in the House in good faith. There are millions of jobs at stake. This is about the lives of millions of people and entire regions. I want to make one thing clear: no government member will be able to look any Canadian in the eye if, having helped the banks and the oil companies, it refuses to help economic sectors that employ millions of people. There is no excuse for that kind of negligence, none whatsoever.

The Prime Minister also showed that he had learned nothing from the latest election results in Quebec, by upholding the decision to cut subsidies to economic development organizations. We expected this government to show some openness and to reverse this decision, to show its willingness to respect the Quebec nation's way of doing things. Reversing this decision would not have cost a cent. Instead, the Prime Minister decided to be stubborn and to impose a decision for no good reason. This is not acceptable.

I would also like to remind the Prime Minister that culture, one of the building blocks of the Quebec nation, represents 314,000 jobs in Quebec. We asked him to commit to reinstating cultural programs, as did the Government of Quebec, municipalities, regions and artists. This foolish decision to make unjustified cuts to culture was at the heart of the last election campaign. But no, the government chose to be stubborn once again, for no good reason. This is not acceptable to the Quebec nation.

The government announced that it was willing to accelerate investments in infrastructure through Building Canada, and that is good. But why not commit to accelerating the excise tax transfer to municipalities, or to creating a high-speed train link between Quebec City, Montreal and Windsor? The government also needs to inject

money into the economy by investing in affordable housing. Members will remember that there is a huge surplus at the CMHC.

Government assistance for financial institutions must be contingent on banks offering credit under normal conditions to individuals and small- and medium-sized businesses. There was none about this in the throne speech. But how can we go along with the government rescuing banks but not imposing minimum conditions, which would simply require the banks to do their job?

Lastly, reducing Quebec's dependence on oil is also necessary. This economic crisis should not distract us from our environmental responsibilities.

• (1140)

With a bit of courage, this challenge could be used as a wonderful opportunity to rejuvenate and modernize our economies and ensure the prosperity of future generations. We want the government to commit to a change in course by no longer supporting an oil economy and by applying the Kyoto principles, as unanimously voted for by Quebec's National Assembly. Yet, the word "Kyoto" does not appear in the Speech from the Throne. There is nothing in the throne speech to indicate that the Prime Minister has finally abandoned his role as the main lobbyist for Canada's oil industry. In fact, the Prime Minister has promised to provide even more assistance to oil producers by relaxing regulations. And he is committing to supporting the nuclear industry with our taxes.

Economically, the Conservative government has shown an appalling lack of leadership. With respect to the environment, it has its head in the sand. The worst part is that the Prime Minister is once again showing his complete lack of sensitivity towards the public. The federal government was able to put its fiscal house in order thanks to the sacrifices of Quebeckers and Canadians. Workers were literally pillaged by Ottawa. A good portion of the federal surplus came from the surplus in the employment insurance fund. Again last year, the government siphoned \$2.3 billion off the fund. This cannot be allowed to continue. It is the government's duty to help those who have lost their jobs.

For example, nothing is stopping the government from eliminating the two-week waiting period or from enhancing the system by expanding access to it and finally offering an income support program for older workers. Eliminating the waiting period would cost next to nothing and an income support program for older workers would only cost the federal government \$45 million a year. Not a single word was mentioned about this in the Speech from the Throne.

The government also has a responsibility to help seniors and retirees who are being hit by the financial crisis. For example, the government could change the rules for RRSPs. There was nothing about this in the throne speech.

By embarking on a major program to build and renovate affordable housing, the government would stimulate economic recovery while helping low-income families. By creating incentive programs to reduce home energy use and encourage people to buy green cars, the government would stimulate recovery while helping families. We must support people.

The Address

We can stimulate economic recovery and, at the same time, reduce poverty and help families breathe a bit. But there is nothing about that in the throne speech. There is no vision, no ambition, no compassion. We were very disappointed, and I am certain that the people of Canada are as well.

In the 1990s, cuts to employment insurance forced many unemployed people onto welfare, adding to the financial burden on Quebec and the provinces. At the same time, Ottawa cut transfers to Quebec and the provinces, downloading its deficit onto them.

The results were disastrous. These cuts dealt a blow to the health and education systems across the country and seriously weakened the finances of the other levels of government. That is how the fiscal imbalance was created. This downloading by the federal government was a real catastrophe, and we would like to believe that no federal government will ever again do such a thing. Unfortunately, the current government has said it intends to reduce and cap equalization payments.

One of the first actions this government plans to take could reduce transfers to Quebec and the have-not provinces by hundreds of millions of dollars. This is completely unacceptable to the Bloc Québécois and to Quebec, especially since the federal government still has not cleaned up its own act. Operating costs—bureaucratic expenditures—have gone up by 75% in the past nine years.

We expected the government to clearly state its intention to shoulder its responsibilities, without going back on its promises to Quebec and the provinces.

• (1145)

We also expected a clear commitment from the government that it would completely eliminate the fiscal imbalance. Instead, in the Speech from the Throne, the government reiterated its old formula based on the social union agreement, which the Government of Quebec has already rejected a number of times. The Prime Minister is again repeating another empty promise regarding a charter of open federalism.

In the throne speech, the government said it has increased transfers for post-secondary education, which is false. Yet, to ensure a sustainable economic future, nothing is more important than investing in education. To that end, the government must restore post-secondary education transfers to 1995 levels, that is, before the cuts imposed in the 1990s. For Quebec, this would mean \$820 million.

We were willing to compromise and accept, for instance, that these transfers be restored gradually, over several years. Instead, the government decided to turn its back on the fiscal imbalance. This is unacceptable for Quebec and for the Bloc Québécois.

The Prime Minister has said nothing about this fundamental principle whereby the federal government must shoulder its financial and fiscal responsibilities. Instead, the Minister of Finance wants to scale down the government's commitments to Quebec and the provinces, and ignore its promise to correct the fiscal imbalance, while refusing to clean up its own bureaucratic spending. This shows an appalling lack of leadership and we want no part of it.

During the recent election campaign, the Prime Minister declared his love for Quebec, pointing out that he had recognized the Quebec nation. Accordingly, the least one might have expected from the throne speech was that it contain a general principle to the effect that the federal government's policies and legislation should take the existence of the Quebec nation into account in some concrete fashion.

Quebec asked the federal government to begin negotiations to return jurisdiction for culture to Quebec, which would be entirely reasonable for a nation. There is no mention of this in the Speech from the Throne.

When you recognize a nation, you must also recognize in concrete terms its language, culture, way of doing things and values. Yet, the government is once again attempting to impose its will on Quebec by introducing repressive laws against young offenders, reducing the political clout of the Quebec nation and creating a federal securities commission to concentrate its powers in Toronto rather than helping Quebec.

The Prime Minister is promising new intrusions into health and education. And if he insists on proceeding with the dismantling of the gun registry, as he indicated in the throne speech, he could at least have proposed that this responsibility and the corresponding funds be transferred to the Government of Quebec.

The government was asked to not reopen the debate on abortion in the throne speech. Yet, this Speech from the Throne is the logical and ideological continuation of the last Conservative Party of Canada convention.

The Bloc Québécois cannot accept such indifference towards the Quebec nation, its aspirations, values and interests.

The Prime Minister's throne speech demonstrates that he has written off Quebec, not learned a thing from the election and that his love for Quebec was just plain rhetoric.

Just two months ago, the Prime Minister called an early election, claiming that this House had become dysfunctional and that he wanted a strong mandate to face the economic crisis. The public decided to keep him in a minority government, particularly in Quebec. But the Prime Minister did not understand this message. He refused to be open and to make compromises in his throne speech, and preferred once again to focus on Conservative ideology.

The Conservative leader refuses to show leadership by providing strong support for the economy. The Prime Minister still shows the same lack of sensitivity towards the people who are affected by or very worried about the crisis.

Lastly, the Prime Minister showed that he learned nothing from what Quebecers expressed in the last election.

• (1150)

This throne speech has no vision or direction, is offensive to Quebec, and lacks the sense of urgency or broad outlook that one would expect from a Prime Minister in a time of crisis.

This is why I move, seconded by the member for Joliette, that the amendment be amended by adding after the words "in the opposition" the following:

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“that the House recognize that the Speech from the Throne is unanimously decried in Quebec because it reflects a Conservative ideology that was rejected by 78 percent of the Quebec nation on October 14 and that as a result the House denounce the fact that it does not respond to the consensus in Quebec respecting, for instance, the legislation on young offenders, the repatriation to Quebec of powers over culture and communications, the elimination of the federal spending power and the maintenance of the existing system of securities regulation.”

• (1155)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Secretary of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I obviously listened closely to the speech my colleague, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, gave. Looking beyond his partisanship, we could see that the obvious common denominator was the economy.

We know that the situation is critical and out of the ordinary. Our Speech from the Throne is based on the economy. It was pointed out that concerted action has been taken following the meeting of the G-20 leaders. We talk about reforming the financial system. We also talk about helping our lending institutions get through this, economically speaking. These are positive steps. So it is an outrage to hear about a lack of leadership when it is absolutely untrue. There is hope.

There is a responsible government here that talks about protecting jobs in the manufacturing sector. We talk about the aerospace industry as well as traditional industries like fisheries, mining and forestry. We talk about protecting the supply management system, which is so important to Quebec's farmers and which is the foundation of Quebec's economy. And I have not even mentioned the measures we have announced that will help our families and older workers. We also talk about maintaining transfers to the provinces for social programs and health care.

It may not have been mentioned, but it is a guarantee that is undeniable and immeasurable for Quebec and the provinces. We talk about stimulating investments, but we also talk about expediting investments for infrastructure, both in the regions and in the cities, and this is needed. All of this, with responsible management from the government.

My question is simple. Even though he opposes the Speech from the Throne, will my colleague go beyond partisanship and work with the government to do something about the economy?

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, the member is telling us that investments in Building Canada are going to be expedited, and in fact I pointed this out, if he had been listening. However, I told him that it could be done better if there were also a different formula and, for example, the excise tax rebate to municipalities were sped up. Those are concrete things that could be proposed.

Next, he tells me they are going to work on it. Of course. Proposals have been made and are being made all the time, and in fact they are costed. The member tells me they talk about there being problems in the fisheries and the manufacturing and forestry sectors. Well yes, they talk about it, but beyond observations, where are the concrete proposals in this throne speech? There are none. It is fuzzy, it is vague, it is uninspired. That is the problem.

We were told that the Speech from the Throne would be about the economy, when in fact it offers more specific things about young

offenders, for example, or the transfer of the securities commission to Toronto. I hope he is going to be able to work with the rest of Quebec, because he is a member from Quebec. Everyone in Quebec is saying “No, not that!” What is he going to say: “Yes, my party!” or “Yes, my country!” That is the problem with this member.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech by the leader of the Bloc with great interest. He spoke specifically about the fact that the Conservative government was doing nothing for the forestry industry. We are very glad that the Bloc is joining the NDP in opposing this Speech from the Throne.

It must be pointed out that the Conservative government cannot do anything to help the forestry industry because of the softwood lumber agreement that was supported by the Bloc Québécois in this House. The Bloc endorsed that policy, one based on Conservative ideology, which led to the loss of thousands and thousands of jobs in Quebec, in Abitibi—Témiscamingue, in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. Those Quebecers lost their jobs because of the Bloc's support for the softwood lumber agreement.

Because of that, the Government of Quebec can do nothing to address the crisis in the forestry industry. It can do nothing to reverse the decline in the forestry industry and the loss of thousands of jobs.

My question is very simple: is the leader of the Bloc Québécois prepared to admit today that it was a mistake for the Bloc Québécois to support the softwood lumber agreement and tie the hands of the Government of Quebec so it is unable to do anything to help the forestry industry? We know what the outcome was. Thousands of jobs were lost in Quebec, because the Bloc Québécois supported the Conservative government.

• (1200)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, agreeing with Quebec's unions and labour federations—which support the Bloc, not the NDP—is never a mistake. Agreeing with the Quebec federation of chambers of commerce, the Fédération Québécoise des Municipalités, and forestry companies in Quebec is never a mistake.

We speak for Quebecers. Sure, the NDP has one member from Quebec, who represents Outremont, and Mount Royal happens to be in that riding, and there happen to be some trees there, but there is no logging going on. Everyone else told the NDP that its position was out of touch with reality and that its vision was a holdover from the sixties that had nothing to do with what is going on right now.

If the federal government, whether Liberal or Conservative, had given companies loan guarantees to deal with American lawsuits, things would have been different because the American policy was clear. They knew that, in the end, they were going to lose the legal battle in both the WTO and NAFTA. Their strategy was to challenge every defeat until the victor simply wore out. That is what happened. Companies, regions and municipalities were on the brink of bankruptcy, and workers had no jobs. There was no other solution, except for the NDP's nonsensical proposals. In Quebec, politicians have to listen to people and work with them. That is what the Bloc Québécois is doing.

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Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Bloc leader a question about the throne speech. It contains this sentence, in which the member can replace the word “Canada” with “Quebec” if he wants: “Canada’s institutions are the cornerstone of our democracy, our freedom and our prosperity.” As a Liberal, I agree completely with this statement, but I think that the Prime Minister does not believe these words. He broke his own fixed election date law, he went against his own process for selecting a Supreme Court justice and, at a recent Conservative Party convention in Winnipeg, nearly all the members of his party chose to vote against the principles of this country’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Does the Bloc leader think that this Prime Minister believes in the laws of Quebec and Canada?

Mr. Gilles Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, that is a matter of judgment. I have known Liberal and Conservative governments. The problem with Liberal governments was that they did not do what they said they would. The problem with the Conservatives is that they do what they say they are going to do. This is quite a problem. They are acting just as they did at the convention in Winnipeg. Throughout the campaign, they said they were not going to talk about abortion anymore. Yet they applauded the proposals adopted in Winnipeg, which could reopen the abortion debate. They said there would never, ever be a deficit. Now, they are saying that there might be one. When will the Conservatives talk straight?

Because of their ideology, the Conservatives want to do away with the gun registry. What a great mentality. They put more people in jail and more weapons on our streets. What a great country. We do not want that.

As I said, the problem with the Conservatives is that they do what they say they will. The problem with the Liberals was that they did not do what they said they would.

• (1205)

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by congratulating you on behalf of New Democrats on your re-election. I trust we will see greater civility and decorum in this chamber.

We also extend our congratulations to the Prime Minister. Our well wishes to the leader of the official opposition in his continued service. And also to the leader of the Bloc Québécois.

[*English*]

On a personal note, I would like to thank the people of Toronto—Danforth for giving me the opportunity to represent them once again. Actually, a bus load of my constituents left Toronto bright and early this morning in the snow, on this occasion primarily from South Asian background, who are very active in the Pakistani community centre. They are to be arriving on the Hill shortly depending on the weather.

I certainly appreciate the support that so many in my constituency have shown me over the years and I look forward to doing my very best to carry their concerns, as we all do our best to do here in this chamber on the floor of the House of Commons.

I want to thank the people of Canada for electing the second largest New Democrat caucus in our history. Canadians, whom I have met in the past two months during the election period and since in fact over the last several years, are counting on this Parliament to have courage in the face of the adversity which is ever increasingly clear we are facing in the economy.

The economy is facing an unprecedented downturn. Millions of Canadian families are worried right now about their jobs, their pensions, their homes and their savings. They are counting on the federal government to take bold and strategic steps.

[*Translation*]

The words in yesterday’s throne speech do not match the urgency or the depth of what is required to protect working families today. Canadians were hoping for more from the throne speech. New Democrats were expecting more.

[*English*]

As the effective opposition across this country from the farthest points north, south, east and west of this great country, New Democrats will be demanding more of the government.

We will not be supporting the throne speech. The speech that we are asked to endorse will not ease the sleepless nights of many Canadians. The throne speech spoke about a crisis but it took no bold action to deal with it. It spoke about renewal but it set no targets to revitalize the economy, and it set the same course that we have seen followed that brought us into this situation. It spoke of the inevitability of budget deficits while foolishly proceeding with additional unconditional corporate tax cuts that make no sense.

Parliament is faced with a great test. It could turn out to be a great test of our generation. While not asked to achieve independence or fight in the great wars, as our ancestors and veterans have done, nevertheless we are asked to take our nation through a global economic crisis, one that is already cutting deep into the real economy.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

New Democrats have always believed that the economy must be judged on how well it serves the needs and aspirations of all our people. We believe markets can bring prosperity, but they cannot do it alone.

Sometimes governments have to get off the side lines, shore up a failing side and be part of the solution—not wait for an invisible hand to set things right.

[*English*]

We believe in strategic investment by government, not in unconditional corporate giveaways. We believe that productivity and enterprise drive the economy, not low corporate tax rates. We believe in fighting for Canadian workers, their jobs and their communities.

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We believe that government should be about fairness and prosperity for all Canadians, for people like Jack Nijjer in Kamloops who is fearing for his small business; Jennifer Sanderson in St. John's, who is worried about her children's future; and people like the countless young Canadians with bright ideas for a greener tomorrow.

Around the world even Conservative governments are recognizing that government not only has a role to play but has a responsibility to act. Leaders everywhere are taking decisive action but the Conservative government has not shown the same courage.

It is a cause for great concern that most major world economies are in or very close to recession right now. World stock markets are down 40% and \$7 trillion has been injected into the global capital supply.

[*Translation*]

But I am even more worried about auto sector job losses in Windsor, mills closing in Trois-Rivières and forecasts that put all of Canada on the edge of recession.

Consumer bankruptcies in September were 20% higher than August. Unemployment is projected to rise next year to 7%, but that is not the full story

[*English*]

I am reminded of the occasion during the election campaign when the Prime Minister and I visited Welland, Ontario. I saw our decaying industrial heartland. I spoke to workers who had lost their jobs when the 100-year-old John Deere plant closed. In fact, they were called to a meeting fully expecting that there would be an announcement of a major investment in the plant because it was remarkably productive and remarkably profitable.

John Deere had just declared an astounding quarterly profit on which it received a tax reduction as a part of the government's approach. Temporary workers had been brought in by the dozens in order to boost the production of its product. What were they told at that meeting? They were told that the plant was going to be shut down and hundreds of workers were going to be thrown into the streets. Those grim and determined faces I am never going to forget. The Prime Minister chose not to meet those workers and look them in their faces.

While the Prime Minister tinkers with the status quo, those families cannot put food on the table. They are counting on a government that will stand up for them and begin to take action to rebuild the real economy. Right now those people are spending their savings just to get by. In fact, some of them are reaching into their credit cards to pay for their mortgages. It is impossible to imagine a more desperate situation.

[*Translation*]

Good-paying, family-raising jobs are being replaced with low wage, insecure jobs without pensions.

This government is not looking out for the middle class who feel more pressure month by month, working harder and harder to keep up. Instead, this government is throwing money away on unconditional corporate tax cuts. This government is intent on giving to the

sectors that need it least, rather than those that need it most. This makes no sense.

• (1215)

[*English*]

The productivity of our workforce is the engine of our prosperity, but for the first time in half a century a Canadian Prime Minister has let productivity fall under his watch. We now work more to produce less.

Now the crisis could be and should be an opportunity to get things right. It could be an opportunity to boost productivity and combine environmental protection with economic growth in exciting new ways. It could be an opportunity to ensure good public services and a robust infrastructure that would attract investment, improve the quality of life. It could be an opportunity to stabilize the economy, to foster enterprise and to really encourage small business.

We need bold and strategic measures to set our country on the right course. The 21st century is new and different. The tired old 20th century solutions will not work any more. Other countries are beginning to realize it. Our friends south of the border have begun to realize it and they are making those changes happen. We should be making those kinds of changes right here in Canada.

Let us build prosperity by investing in the inherent productivity that resides in the talent and the creativity, and the energy of our people in the real economy.

First, let us introduce financial regulations that protect consumers in this economy. Even though strong regulations have kept our banking sector somewhat more stable than others, the effects of the global market turmoil are unavoidable.

Stronger oversight is needed to track the \$75 billion of Canadian taxpayers' money that has already been given to secure banks. If there is assistance to ailing sectors, taxpayers need a full account, and where appropriate an equity stake in return.

The federal government can protect consumers by ensuring that credit card companies stop hiking interest rates on cash strapped families that miss a payment. That is simply unfair.

Second, let us invest in the new energy economy of the 21st century. That is how we can create prosperity for the future, and a planet that will be sustainable and liveable for the next generation.

We do not have to choose between economic growth and fighting climate change. We can put a price on carbon with a real cap and trade program that makes that big polluters pay. Then we can harness the sun, the wind, the water, the biomass and energy efficiency in ways that will take us forward and be more productive.

[*Translation*]

Canadian innovation can make us leaders in renewable technology and create green collar jobs. We must begin by creating thousands of jobs right now, energy retro-fitting our homes and buildings.

The Address

Third, let us invest in enterprise and innovation in the private sector and in our research institutions. Canadian companies lead the world in information technology. Our small businesses produce original ideas.

[English]

Our universities and colleges should lead the world in practical innovation. Our young people can do it. Our academics are up to the job. They have proven it. However, we have to do more with incentives for job creation and better support for R and D and innovation funding.

Fourth, let us make strategic investments in infrastructure and the real economy. Let us commit to an ambitious plan to partner with our communities to repair our crumbling cities and invest in public transit. Let us start building affordable housing.

We have relied on raw log resource exports and raw material exports for far too long. We need credit guarantees for viable companies in the forestry sector that are otherwise perfectly profitable and productive but because of the credit crunch are looking at having to close their doors. We need that support now. It should have been in the Speech from the Throne.

We also need to take the opportunity to transform the auto sector, to develop low emission vehicles so Canada can be on the leading edge of providing the kind of transportation that Canadians want, transportation that pollutes less, costs them less and keeps jobs right here in Canada with the best auto-making workforce we can find. Canadians want these vehicles and it is also the right thing for the planet.

Fifth, but certainly not least, we must invest in our social infrastructure. Without a national skills training strategy, we are only going to compound the length and depth of the recession that we face. In the United States, pensions are guaranteed to \$50,000. We need pension insurance and pension protection laws and plans to protect today's seniors. They built this country. They deserve it.

• (1220)

[Translation]

Rule changes to employment insurance by recent governments mean that an unemployed person must exhaust her savings before her EI is even available. This is unfair. Let us fix EI so that the help is there when people need it.

And money will go right back into the local economy to create jobs, keep small businesses afloat, and put food on the table.

[English]

We can also create more jobs right away in child care and care for the aged, with more doctors and nurses and better employment opportunities for first nations. These are actions we could and should take right now in this economically critical time.

The government has to respect the 62% of Canadians who voted for change. That includes pursuing democratic reform with proportional representation. This Parliament has been asked to set aside its differences and to overcome the old politics of partisan battle. However, that does not mean giving the government the very majority that Canadians refused to give them. The government must

compromise. It must work with other parties and opposition must be constructive. New Democrats are the effective opposition. We will challenge the government to do better and to deliver tangible results and real change. We oppose the throne speech because it lacks the bold action that working families need in this time of economic crisis.

I could say that history will judge us and judge us poorly if we fail the test that we face. However, it is not just history that matters. It is the families that are hurting right now. It is the jobs that are being lost today. It is the fears that Canadians have for their future and their children's future that matter.

New Democrats have not forgotten who we are, where we came from, nor whom we represent and we are not about to start forgetting that now. In fact, we are going to bring their concerns to the table every day in the House of Commons. We will never waver from our belief that together we can build a fair and prosperous future for our country and our people.

Do not let anyone tell you, Mr. Speaker, that cannot be done.

• (1225)

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the leader of the NDP on his re-election. As well, we honestly hope and pray for the folks on the bus coming here that they arrive safely.

I listened intently to his comments, quite a number of which were about how government would intervene in the economy and about raising taxes for business.

The hon. member misses the point. Of the tax breaks that were given, over three-quarters of them went to small businesses and families, the type of people he is trying to support.

He also talks about a knock on the tax breaks against these businesses, including the energy development in the west. He knows full well that many of the benefits accrue to many other parts of the country, including Ontario, and also manufacturing in my riding of Tobique—Mactaquac, which does work for the western provinces as well.

How does the leader of the NDP believe that raising taxes to business in this environment is going to help? We really need to lower these taxes to encourage companies to innovate, just as he said he wanted to do, and encourage them to grow, and is a benefit to small businesses. He would hamper that and it would force businesses to go to other countries. That is not what we want.

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, let me also congratulate the hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac on his re-election.

The Address

First, let me make sure that the member understands the position of the New Democratic Party. We take the view that a further tax reduction, which the government is proposing for large, profitable corporations, large banks and oil companies not small businesses, is wrong. It is a multi-billion dollar decision that will not put people back to work. It is a multi-billion dollar decision that assists in driving us further into deficit. It is a multi-billion dollar decision that goes to the wrong place.

The Speech from the Throne and, indeed, governing itself is about making choices. Far from proposing tax increases, we are proposing targeted assistance to the sectors that need the help to transform into the 21st century.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as this is my first speech in this chamber, I am certain that you will allow me to begin by addressing my fellow citizens and thanking them for choosing me as their representative and spokesperson in this place. First, I would like to say thank you and tell them that I will be sure to honour the trust they have placed in me.

I would also like to thank the leader of the NDP who just gave a rather important speech. Before asking him a question, I would like to make the following point. Yesterday, my colleague for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert noted that it was very strange that the government was announcing some rather vague measures to assist industries in trouble at the same time that cuts were being made to industries that are doing very well, such as the cultural industry. There is a dichotomy here.

My colleague, the member for Saint-Jean also noted that the government announced that it was putting measures—fairly vague measures—in place to support the economy, but that it was refusing to require a portion of military expenditures to be made here. My colleague, the leader of the Bloc Québécois, pointed out that billions of dollars are lying dormant at the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and yet they refuse to build public housing or to take measures to kickstart the economy by building public housing.

Several Chinese companies have made investments in Drummondville, in my riding. It was not on the recommendation or with the assistance of the federal government, but through the efforts of local people who made many trips to China to seek out these companies. One of these companies pulverizes tires and sells the product to another company in Drummondville, Soprema. The latter obtained Chinese contracts to build the green roof for China's Olympic stadium. Remarkable efforts were made to identify these companies, make them profitable and work with China, and then the Prime Minister refused to attend the Olympic Games. He almost created a diplomatic incident, making China lose face and probably casting doubt on all the work done to that point.

In light of these examples, does it not seem to the leader of the NDP that the government is acting like a pyromaniac firefighter? It has announced some very vague measures to stimulate the economy and at the same time is adopting measures that will destroy it.

• (1230)

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, I would first like to congratulate the hon. member for Drummond on being elected and on his comments. I would also like to congratulate someone else from

Drummondville, Annick Corriveau, who ran an excellent election campaign and achieved positive results for the NDP in that region. I imagine our candidate and the hon. member are like-minded in some ways, for instance, regarding the proposal that the government should start building more social housing. This is a key proposal, not only for the economy, but also for social justice, for all our families.

I would like to congratulate the hon. member for giving an excellent example of the new economy, and the innovative approach taken in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada. Yet this government does not support that kind of small businesses. It prefers to expand larger, more profitable corporations, the big polluters, the big banks, instead of ensuring that innovation becomes a priority for the Canadian economy.

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Toronto—Danforth on his re-election. While I have lots of respect for the work he has done in the past for municipalities and, of course, his Albert county, New Brunswick roots, which may make me partial to him, I have a quarrel with him.

In his response he said that he wanted to work well in this Parliament and that he wanted to be cooperative but it seems that at every measure he would be determined to vote against the government. Is that not a replay of the last campaign we just went through where the NDP could be so irresponsible on environmental solutions, not supported by the Sierra Club, economists or anybody credible in the environmental field, and yet those members banter and beat their breasts and say that they will do all the things that they want to do knowing they will never be the government? They sit in the House and criticize knowing they will never, ever be the government.

Will the leader of the NDP come clean and say what he would do if he were in government in this current economic crisis with respect to taxing corporations for being polluters? Would he bail out any of the corporations that are in so much need of assistance in order to keep the companies of corporate Canada alive? What would he do in this crucial time as prime minister, which, of course, he never will be?

Hon. Jack Layton: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the language creeping into the conversation because that was the proposition we put to Canadians and we do not intend to give up.

I do want to thank the hon. member for his question and for his reference to my Albert county roots. The red mud of the Petitcodiac is very present, I am sure, in my genetic structure somehow.

However, I must say that I found it odd that he chose to focus on the environmental aspects of the speech because it could probably be characterized as the worst environmental Speech from the Throne given in recent decades. When we consider that so little focus was given to the opportunities that lie before us and the urgency and need for action on the environmental aspects of the crisis that we are facing, it was certainly a disappointment.

The Address

The member asked what specifically we would propose. I do not intend to repeat the five point program that I outlined in my speech but I will draw attention to our recommendation that a fully functional cap and trade system be put in place to put a limit on what the big polluters are emitting. We should not try the shilly-shallying that goes on with this so-called intensity-based cap and trade system.

I am reasonably certain, and I could probably predict, that President-elect Obama will have nothing to do with it because he rejected it himself very explicitly. I would certainly offer to the Prime Minister that if he is looking for some assistance to convert the concept of cap and trade, as it has been advocated globally and by both candidates for the presidency of the United States and by virtually every advanced environmental thinker in the world, and by many other countries in Europe, plus four provinces and eleven states, into the proposal that he would like to bring to the House of Commons, he can count on our collaboration and assistance in making that happen because in that way we will get some real results.

• (1235)

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I must say how pleased I am to participate in the debate on the Speech from the Throne.

First, I will take this opportunity to thank all the constituents in my home riding of Cambridge North Dumfries for once again placing their trust in me for a third time as their member of Parliament.

I especially would like to thank my family for their support as I continue to serve the people of this great nation. Everyone in this chamber knows full well the burden of public office but it is not just borne by those of us who are fortunate enough to be elected. It is also borne by our families. On that note, I want to mention that I cannot thank my wife and two children enough for their support.

I also want to thank the volunteers who worked on my campaign who I have often called the best campaign team in the country. I want to tell them that I will be forever grateful.

[*Translation*]

I am very pleased to address the House here today as the new Minister of State (Science and Technology).

[*English*]

I consider it a great honour and privilege that the Prime Minister asked me to take on the role of Minister of State for Science and Technology in these uncertain times. I want to let everyone know that I look forward to serving Canadians with the same commitment and enthusiasm as I have been doing serving the constituents of the great riding of Cambridge North Dumfries.

I would also like to congratulate the hon. members for Westmount—Ville-Marie, Shefford and Elmwood—Transcona for having been chosen by their respective parties to be critics for the science and technology portfolio. I wish them all well. Although I recognize that we may not always agree on every issue, I know we will work well together on many files because we share a common goal and that is for the good of all Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate you on your re-election as Speaker of the House and I look forward to working with you once again.

As the Prime Minister noted earlier, in this time of extraordinary global economic challenge and uncertainty, Canadians have entrusted this government with a renewed and strengthened mandate. We will devote all of our time and energy to addressing the challenges that families and businesses face both today and as we move forward.

The Speech from the Throne outlines our plan to help protect the economic security of Canadians and ensure our continued economic success. It also builds on the work that we began in our previous mandate by concentrating on the priorities that make a difference in the lives of Canadians.

As Canada's Minister of State for Science and Technology, I would like to take a few minutes to talk about the commitments this government has made in the Speech from the Throne.

In the throne speech, our government made a commitment to work with industry, here at home to provide and apply our country's finest scientific and technological knowledge to create innovative business solutions and to invest in world-class research facilities. This builds on the commitment we made in our election platform to make additional investments in internationally recognized science and technology projects here in Canada.

We are proud of our country's success in developing new innovations. We want to add to that success by ensuring that we can take new technologies from the lab to the marketplace so that Canadians as well as people around the world can benefit.

Our government supports research and development because we know they create jobs. That improves Canadians' quality of life and the quality of their livelihood. It builds a strong economy for future generations. Our prosperity depends not just on meeting the challenges of today, but on building the dynamic economy that will create opportunities and better jobs for Canadians in the future.

Advances in science and technology are essential to strengthening the competitiveness of the economy. Those in the private sector who embrace innovation and continue to invest in R and D, especially during these difficult times, will gain significant rewards for their forethought and perseverance. That is why we will continue to support Canadian researchers and innovators.

In May 2007, the government, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, released mobilizing science and technology to Canada's advantage. This was a forward-thinking science and technology strategy aimed at positioning our nation for global economic leadership. Our goal is to attract the best researchers, equip them with the best facilities and ensure Canadians get the economic benefit from our collective innovations.

In advancing this strategy, we have made significant investments in scientific research setting in place many new policies and programs and articulating our priorities. Altogether, through the last three budgets, the government has announced \$2.4 billion in new funding for science and technology.

The Address

• (1240)

Our science and technology strategy is charting a new direction, one that links the competitive energy of our entrepreneurs with the creative genius of our scientists. It is a bold plan, designed to build a national, sustainable, competitive advantage. It recognizes that Canada needs greater business investment in science and technology and in advanced technologies. It recognizes the need to ensure this new knowledge is applied in the marketplace and to make better use of a talented workforce. We need to make our innovations better and we need to market them further.

This multi-year framework seeks to build on three strategic advantages: first, an entrepreneurial advantage, through the creation of competitive and dynamic business environment that is conducive to greater private sector innovation and that makes Canada an irresistible magnet for investment; second, a knowledge advantage that targets resources to support world-class research excellence and that keeps Canadians at the forefront of research and discovery; and, third, a people advantage that provides Canadians with opportunities to acquire and use science and technology skills and knowledge to grow our base of knowledge workers so Canada has the talent it needs to compete in the changing world.

Taken together, those three advantages will translate knowledge into practical applications that improve the lives and the livelihood of Canadians. They will build on our country's research and engineering strengths to generate new ideas and innovations. They will develop, attract and retain the highly skilled people Canada needs to ensure our continued prosperity in the decades to come.

Our science and technology strategy is guided by four important principles and they are pivotal to achieving these objectives.

The first principle is promoting excellence. We need not look further than the government's past three budgets to find evidence of our strong commitment. Among the most important new vehicles we have created to promote superior innovation are the Canada excellence research chairs. This \$21-million investment in science and technology will enable Canadian universities to recruit, retain and equip the most brilliant and promising researchers the world has to offer. Doing top-notch research in Canadian universities will help to maintain and advance Canada's leadership in the global economy.

Directly related to that and equally as valuable is the new Vanier Canada graduate scholarship program. This prestigious program will award 500 international and Canadian doctoral students with generous three-year scholarships in order to build a world-class research capacity in this country. Attracting top tier doctoral students both here at home and from around the world will contribute further to economic and social research-based growth for a more prosperous future. These investments reinforce that the government understands the importance of supporting the very best of ideas. We know that basic inquiry into big questions at the heart of academic disciplines may not yet yield quick results but can in fact yield crucial results in time.

For the same reason, we have targeted our investments to build world-class research infrastructure through our support of the Canada Foundation for Innovation and large-scale research centres, such as the TRIUMF subatomic physics research laboratory at the

University of British Columbia, and the Canadian Light Source, a synchrotron research facility in Saskatchewan.

The second principle is ensuring that we target federal funding strategically to areas of national strength and opportunity. Now this does not mean abandoning basic research across a broad spectrum of disciplines. As we know, the Government of Canada supports research excellence through many research grants and scholarships, from our granting councils for peer reviewed research, ranging from basic research into fundamental biological processes to applied research that directly supports the development of products for our marketplace.

• (1245)

In total, the Government of Canada invests \$9.7 billion annually to support science and technology. On top of that, there are tax incentives, as I mentioned earlier, valued at approximately \$4 billion a year. These are available to Canadian businesses that invest in research and development.

However, this principle acknowledges that we must first be practical. We must maximize basic and applied research in areas where we are well positioned to make a difference in the world. That is why we are focusing our funding in areas where Canada excels. These include: environmental science and technology; natural resources and energy; health and related sciences and technologies; and information and communications technologies. By setting research priorities, we can target our funding, build partnerships and lever Canada's public research base to maximize our competitive advantage.

The science and tech strategy's third principle recognizes the necessity of fostering partnerships. While the federal government has a vital role to play in promoting excellence in science and tech and in supporting commercialization, we cannot achieve excellence in research and development alone. Provincial, territorial and local governments play a significant role in supporting and developing Canada's science and technology system. Likewise, our universities, teaching hospitals, colleges, even our high schools not only educate but inspire the researchers and business people of tomorrow. Through productive partnerships, the unique capabilities, interests and resources of all these players can be brought to deliver a better outcome for this nation.

The Address

I could cite any number of examples of outstanding partnerships that we are actively advancing in our science and technology strategy. For instance, we are creating 11 new centres of excellence for commercialization and research in areas ranging from advanced applied physics solutions to the pan-provincial vaccine enterprise. We have also established business-led networks for centres of excellence to fund large-scale collaborative networks that support private sector innovation. We have created the college and community innovation program to increase the capacity of colleges to support innovation in our communities.

Our fourth principle is to enhance accountability. Our government believes profoundly that those who are supported by public funds must be held accountable for these investments. They need to demonstrate to taxpayers that results are being achieved and achieved efficiently. Led by the policy research initiative, federal departments are in fact working together to improve the ability to measure the impact of our science and tech investments and to ensure value for the taxpayers' investments.

The science and tech strategy and its core principles underscore our government's commitment and determination to do our part and work with others to get the framework right for innovation and to achieve excellence for the benefit of all Canadians to meet the needs of the nation and our international partners.

Our continued commitment to science and tech reinforced in the Speech from the Throne makes it very clear that the future for innovation looks bright and exciting.

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

I am eager to work with my parliamentary colleagues and with all Canadians in order to realize this enormous potential.

[*English*]

Canadians can be proud of our country's history of innovation and technological advancements: the telephone, the Ski-Doo, insulin, the pacemaker, the electric wheelchair, Plexiglas, the Canadarm, the BlackBerry, and thousands and thousands more. We do not just need to innovate more; we need to get those products to the marketplace. We need to make it better and market it further.

As we have in the past, and even more so in this time of global economic uncertainty, we need to gather our minds and open our doors to the world around us creating, innovating and marketing. If we do so, we will not only take the lead but we will be the leaders of nations. We will inspire the future. We will have a high standard of living. We will attract and keep the best researchers.

In closing, I want to reiterate that Canadians have renewed their confidence in this government and we are committed to providing the strong leadership that Canadians expect and deserve. We will continue to establish effective policies that give a competitive advantage to this country. We will strengthen the institutions that keep Canadians safe, secure and prosperous. As history has continually shown, when Canada is challenged, we square our shoulders and face the challenge. I am sure we will emerge, as we always have, from this period stronger and more united than ever.

Mrs. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over one million Canadian children live in poverty. There are 83,000 children in my home city of Toronto who go to school hungry. Some 550,000 households live below the poverty line. Poverty did not get a single mention in the throne speech.

What will the government do to protect the most vulnerable Canadians during this economic slowdown and ensure they are part of the knowledge economy?

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the hon. member for her question and congratulate her on her election win.

This government is absolutely committed to a knowledge-based economy. We understand fully, more so than any previous government in my memory, that a knowledge-based economy and creating innovation and improving productivity come from the investments that we and the private sector make in new developments.

When we invent something new, if we can take it from the laboratory, get it into the factory and start producing it, that creates jobs. It creates thousands and thousands of jobs, as we have seen in the past. Of course, the folks who are doing that work are well paid. That is the initiative we are after. They take that home and they and their children lead a better quality life.

This government is fully committed to science and technology. We propose to work to get those technological advances that Canada is best at and which we know the world needs. I will certainly admit that we are in a difficult economic time, but our commitment is to continue to invest in the science and tech sector and actually get those things to market, which produces jobs. That, of course, will create a better life for Canadian families and secure businesses moving forward.

• (1255)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the Speaker in his position once more in the 40th Parliament.

I would like to congratulate the member on his election. We sat together in one of those notoriously fractious committees in the last Parliament. I am hoping that in the new spirit of parliamentary conciliation our new committee structures will be much more open and workable.

I listened with fascination to my colleague's speech. I think we all agree that innovation and education are absolutely essential for building a 21st century economy. However, I was struck by the enormous disconnect between the language that I am hearing from the member and the reality that I am seeing in my region.

This month the Conservative government made an announcement that it was sending a wrecking ball to the community of Attawapiskat, which has sat with toxic school grounds for 30 years. For 10 years it was without a school. The only solution the government has is to send in a wrecking ball to leave 400 children with no school facilities. There are similar situations in Kashechewan, White Dog and Fort Severn.

The Address

In communities where there are no schools, dropouts begin in grade four. The failure rates of first nations' education are below standards that we see in the third world.

The people of Attawapiskat have been pushing for a school for 10 years. Next week they will be meeting with the education leaders of Canada at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education to discuss the need for an appropriate strategy to ensure that first nations children in isolated reserves are guaranteed just the most basic education rights: the right to attend clean, safe schools and the right to ensure that within provincial jurisdictions on which isolated reserves exist the children are not being unfairly discriminated against.

I would like to ask the member, what concrete steps will the government take to make sure that a young generation of incredible potential is not just tossed away on the toxic junk piles? Will the government make sure there is actually a strategy to ensure that communities like Attawapiskat are given great schools so that we can actually develop a 21st century agenda that we can be proud of as Canadians?

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I certainly did have some good times on committee. I congratulate him on his election win.

I look forward to working with the provinces and the territories as we move forward in terms of our education systems around the country. In the future economy as we shift from the old economy, as we are being pressed by the world, we need to invest more in science and technology. That is exactly what the government has been doing.

We have shown leadership in this area to create not just the technologies that would help clean up the land the member talked about, not just technologies that would make the schools that we intend to build more efficient, but better in terms of climate change and less expensive to operate in terms of energy use. That is what science and technology is all about. It is a great opportunity for us to invest in science and technology to help move forward on these problems.

This government invests more in research at the university level than does any other nation in the G-7. We are number one. We should be proud of our Canadian researchers. We actually have the greatest publication rate per capita of the G-7 nations.

As Canadians always do, we are doing great yeoman's work in this area.

Again, to stay with the member's question, it points strongly to the fact that the solutions to these types of problems rest with Canadian scientists and researchers. I look forward to working with all our partners to help out.

• (1300)

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in listening to the hon. member for Cambridge, it appears that he cares deeply about the importance of science. My question to him is a very simple one. Why did his government eliminate the position of the national science adviser, a position created by the previous Liberal government, a crucial position to advise the Prime Minister of this country?

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his win and welcome him to this great House.

The fact is the Prime Minister has shown commitment to the science and technology sector in every single one of our budgets. He has shown leadership on this file by putting it back into a minister of state position, which the hon. member's party cut.

What I would tell the member is we have changed a single advisory position to a council, a group of members of some of the brightest minds in this country. I look forward to taking the advice and seeking counsel from that group of scientists versus one person.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, earlier I asked a question about the commitment to the institutions of our country, particularly Parliament.

I also wanted to ask the Prime Minister about the reason we had an election. The Prime Minister's reasoning was the dysfunction. I will ask the member whether he has any views on the dysfunction that took place in the last Parliament.

If the House gives its consent I would like to table about 30 emails which particularly mention that member and his gratuitous partisan attacks on the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics during the in and out scandal.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Does the hon. member have consent to table the emails?

Some hon. members: No.

Hon. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, I have just as many emails on the incompetence of the chair in that committee, but I will not ask to table them. What I will tell the House is what I will not do.

As the member knows full well, he never supported any of the budgets to increase research and technology in this country. In the best economic decade of this country, the Liberals cut funding to research and development. They cut funding to science and technology. They cut funding to the National Research Council. That was during the best economic times.

I will not take any lessons from that member of the House.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with another Atlantic Canadian, the member for Halifax West.

As a new member of Parliament it is not only a privilege but an honour to have this opportunity today to respond to the Speech from the Throne.

I am able to be here to do so because of many people, especially my family, who have supported me unconditionally. I served for 11 years in provincial politics, both in government and opposition, so they know only too well how chaotic things can get. I am grateful to the hundreds of volunteers who worked tirelessly on my behalf. I am sure we all recognize that without our volunteers none of us would be here.

The Address

The decision by the people of Random—Burin—St. George's to elect me as their member of Parliament is something for which I will always be grateful. I represent one of the largest ridings in the country. There are 185 communities in the riding, eight of which are isolated, and to drive from one end of the riding to the other takes nine hours. The people of Random—Burin—St. George's have placed their confidence in me to not only represent their interests but to make sure their concerns will not be ignored.

I heard what was in the Speech from the Throne yesterday and today I am going to talk about, regrettably, what was not in the speech.

Canadians are in a state of turmoil and nowhere is this more evident than in the riding I represent. For many, trying to contend with the high cost of heating fuel and gasoline has become a burden, yet there was no acknowledgement in the Speech from the Throne that this situation has to be addressed.

When we see seniors congregating in shopping malls in order to keep warm, there is a problem in this country. When they have to choose between food and fuel in order to heat their homes, we are doing an injustice by our seniors who have contributed so much to our country.

The irony in this is that as the price of oil dropped, oil companies did not drop the prices they charged to consumers proportionately. Only when it became really obvious that consumers were being gouged did the companies act, and then reluctantly.

Our seniors need help and, as hard as it is to believe, the word “senior” does not even appear in the throne speech. The very people who built this great country were simply ignored.

It is obvious from the Speech from the Throne that despite the position taken by the Prime Minister on CTV's *Question Period* a little over a month ago when he said that we are not going into a deficit, that is exactly where we are heading. The throne speech makes that very clear.

Why would a government put the country in such a circumstance? Money was flowing like water prior to the election and now just a month later the government is singing a different tune using the global economic crisis as the explanation for what is to come.

The reality is that if the Conservative government had acted responsibly, spent wisely, and had continued with the buffer that previous Liberal governments had in place in the event of an economic crisis, we would be the envy of those countries that, through no fault of their own, are finding themselves in a difficult position.

We all know that it is a common practice, where possible, to put savings aside for a rainy day. Why is it such a difficult concept for the government to grasp?

The people from my province of Newfoundland and Labrador, like Canadians everywhere, are hard-working and when faced with adversity rise to the occasion. When the Speech from the Throne says, “In the face of this uncertainty, just as when faced with difficulties before, Canadians will prevail”, I agree. The question is: Why make it difficult for them? Why put them in that situation needlessly?

Nearly three years of irresponsible spending and economic mismanagement is what led us to this deficit and now Canadians will have to suffer as a result of it. In just two short years the government oversaw the disappearance of a \$12 billion surplus. Again it begs the question: Why?

Those seniors who are on fixed incomes, who cannot tighten their belts any further, and who need a government to recognize their plight is but one group in our society who will be a casualty of the Conservative government's mismanagement, and that is a tragedy.

● (1305)

Another omission in the Speech from the Throne is the need to recognize those individuals who have worked tirelessly in industries that really take their toll on people and, if given the resources, would be able to retire with dignity and while doing so, create jobs for others.

While I am sure there are other industries where the work is extremely difficult, I am sure there is nothing that takes its toll on a body more than working day in and day out in a fish plant or as a crew member on a fishing boat. Those of us who represent rural communities where fishing is the main industry know only too well how hard people in the industry work.

The fishery is a major employer in the riding I represent, but measures need to be taken to ensure the industry continues to be viable, and one way of doing that is to bring young people into the industry. To do this, however, there has to be an opportunity for people to retire from the industry with dignity.

I know of men and women who have worked in a fish plant for 40 years, standing for hours on a concrete floor. They had no choice but to work under these conditions for years in order to provide for their families. In small rural communities opportunities for employment are limited.

The humane thing for a government to do would be to help fund a retirement program which would see the older workers retire and young workers enter the industry.

While governments cut taxes for businesses as a means of helping them compete and create jobs, this is another way to create employment for Canadians while recognizing the contribution made by others. As I said earlier, I am sure there are other industries in the country that would benefit from such an initiative.

Another omission in the throne speech was any kind of detailed mention of the need to provide for our children, especially those who live in poverty. Today is National Child Day and we are all wearing a ribbon to show the significance of that day. The government missed an opportunity to highlight the importance of providing for our children. One obvious way of doing so would be to initiate a plan to lift families out of poverty.

Our children are our future and so many of them fall through the cracks because there is no concerted effort to make sure that they receive every opportunity to not only survive, but excel. When I look at how and what the government will spend money on, it is obvious that the most vulnerable in our society are shortchanged.

The Address

One of the speakers yesterday, in responding to the Speech from the Throne and talking about our great country, made reference to “from coast to coast”. There is a third coast. When those of us in Newfoundland and Labrador hear commentary that refers to the country as, “from Victoria to Halifax” or “from coast to coast”, we like to give a friendly reminder that there is another coast and a province of which we are very proud.

I conclude my remarks today by congratulating, first, those who, like me, were elected for the first time on October 14. No matter what political party we represent, we will always have something in common. I am so grateful to those who have gone out of their way to share their knowledge and the benefit of their experience in the federal parliamentary system with me.

● (1310)

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about making child poverty history. This is an area that New Democrats have long been pushing for.

In the throne speech there is no money to create affordable child care. There is no money to expand the child benefits up to \$400 per child per month. There is no money to build new affordable housing to help the thousands of Canadians who are desperately waiting for affordable housing. There is hardly any mention of employment insurance or raising workers' living wages to \$10 an hour. There are absolutely no new things in the throne speech.

Instead, we have really something of the past, the past commitment of the infrastructure funds, past commitments on the homelessness funds, and past commitments to deal with the settlement of immigrants. Given that the throne speech offers no bold solutions to the economic situation that is facing us, how can it possibly be that the Liberal Party is supporting—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, clearly, that is a question that needs to be put to the current minority government. The fact that there are no initiatives in the throne speech to deal with issues of poverty and homelessness is exactly why we are here today and making a point of that.

I would ask the hon. member whether or not her party would support the government. At this point in time, we are in a position where bringing down the government would put us back into another election, yet another costly venture for Canadians. I would much rather see that money go into supporting children and homeless people who need our support.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague from Random—Burin—St. George's for her excellent maiden speech in the House, but it is clear that she is certainly not new to politics nor being in a legislature. As she said, she served for nine years in the legislature of Newfoundland and Labrador. I think we are improved by her presence here, although it does not mean her predecessor was not also an excellent member of the House, as she would know.

During the nine years she served in provincial politics she worked extensively with fishing communities and I think she would probably like to speak more. I know she could elaborate more in

terms of the kinds of problems she sees the people in those communities facing now.

● (1315)

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, it is only when we have an opportunity to actually live and work with people who live and work in fishing communities that we have a truer appreciation for how difficult the circumstances are under which they have to survive. When we talk about people in rural communities, in a lot of cases, the only opportunity they have for employment is, in fact, in the fishing industry.

As I said in my remarks, I have seen individuals who have worked day in and day out, people who are now in their late fifties and sixties, who really do need to be able to retire from the industry. But retire to what? That is the problem we are facing today. We have so many people who, if we could, in fact, take them out of the industry, would be able to live comfortably through other resources.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I want to congratulate my hon. colleague. Indeed, she has spent quite a bit of time in provincial politics. Her riding neighbour is also mine, and the people of Harbour Breton are very proud. They are particularly close to me, and I meet a lot of them.

I want to ask her about a situation not so much in the fishery but in the forestry industry. I want to talk about the issue of dignity. One of the things that came up in the campaign was how people ease out of employment with a great deal of dignity. Early retirement is a major issue in her riding as well as mine. I would like for her to talk about the situations she was faced with. She touched on it in her speech very eloquently. She talked about the fact that when people achieve early retirement, they are doing it at the ages between 60 and 65 in an industry that is very tough, not only in the fishery but also the forestry. I would like her to comment.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, when we work alongside and know how difficult it is to work in an industry like the forestry or fishery, then we know only too well the toil it takes on those individuals. They do need an opportunity to be able to retire with dignity, to get out of working in an environment that has been really difficult on them. Many of them want just that. They want to be able to retire and live a comfortable life, after a life that has been very difficult on them for the past 30 or 40 years.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope that the former member for Random—Burin—St. George's, Bill Matthews, is watching today because he will see that the excellent tradition that he carried on while he was here is being continued by the new member for that riding. I am so glad that I mentioned the fact that he was also the member because otherwise I would be hearing from him for sure.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to congratulate you on your re-election. I would also like to congratulate all members who, thanks to their election, hold a seat in the House of Commons. I would like to congratulate all new and returning members. It is an honour for us to sit in this place. It is a privilege and with it comes considerable responsibility.

*The Address**[English]*

I also want to thank my wife Kelly and my children, as well as my parents, for their support and guidance every day, and all those who supported me and worked for me in the last campaign, but it is of course my responsibility to serve all of my constituents.

Winston Churchill once said, "It's not enough that we do our best; sometimes we have to do what's required". The people of Halifax West sent me back here for a fifth time to do just that, to do what is required. I am grateful and deeply honoured to have this responsibility. We must do what is required for the future of our country.

Today is National Child Day, as has been mentioned. What we do in the next few weeks and the next few years will have a profound impact on the next generation. In these tough economic times, those children and all Canadians deserve a Parliament that will do what is required, that will put people ahead of petty partisan ideology. Yet it is our responsibility on this side of the House to hold the government to account and cause it to face up to reality, to face up to the facts before us.

Unfortunately, Canada has entered the escalating economic crisis that is gripping the globe with a lot fewer options than we should have. We are on the cusp of a deficit because of the actions, or lack of action, by the government over the past two years. Canadians know we have seen two years of mismanagement and that the government has put us in a very difficult position.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance have demonstrated gross incompetence over and over again. They squandered a \$12 billion surplus that they inherited from the previous Liberal government. They abandoned the \$3 billion contingency reserve, which was a hallmark of fiscal prudence, a cushion that made sure governments did not fall into deficit. They abandoned that idea entirely. They recklessly became the biggest spending government in this country's history.

Who is paying the price for this fiscal incompetence, this economic mismanagement? It is Canadians, Canadian families, Canadian seniors, Canadian forestry workers, Canadian auto workers, poor people and pensioners. What is the government's solution? Its solution is a broken promise on deficits.

A month ago the Prime Minister was saying it was a ridiculous notion to think that the government would go into deficit. Now he is talking about it as if it is an ordinary thing. We are talking about a garage sale of crown assets and a Speech from the Throne that has little new and much that has gone unmentioned.

It is time for the Prime Minister and his finance minister to own up to their fiscal incompetence and economic mismanagement.

Some in the country are opening the door. We are hearing some people saying that it is actually maybe not so bad having a deficit. They are letting the government off the hook. How soon they forget. They should ask Michael Wilson if it is easy to get rid of a deficit, as his boss Brian Mulroney promised back in 1984. What did he do? Instead he doubled the debt over that period and left the country with the highest deficit in history of \$42 billion. How soon they forget.

Once deficits have started, it is obviously very hard to remove them. They could ask, if he were here, and unfortunately and regrettably John Savage is not here today to tell us, what it was like to deal with the debt that he inherited in my province of Nova Scotia from the Buchanan government, which started with a debt of less than half a billion dollars. In only 10 years it increased by 700%.

It is not easy for governments. Once they are in deficit, once that borrowing habit is started, it is a hard habit to kick and a very dangerous one.

The American philosopher George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". The government was left with a \$12 billion surplus. It cannot point the finger at the previous government because whatever investments were made by the previous government, it still left behind a \$12 billion surplus.

● (1320)

The government arrived in government with the best fiscal conditions of any government in the country's history and it is trying to blame the world economy for the fact that it is already falling into deficit. Previous governments before this one would have given their eye teeth for such fiscal conditions, for such ability to spend and to keep the economy in good shape, but the government squandered it.

[Translation]

They ran a deficit for three months this year. The government is heading for a deficit, and current economic conditions will lead it further into deficit. They did not have to fall into such a serious deficit situation, but their choices created their current situation. And that is certainly a deficit.

● (1325)

[English]

As a country we will have much less ability to respond to what is happening in the world economy and in our country and its economy. As a result, the country will be left in a much worse situation than it would be otherwise because of the steps the government took over the past two years. It is really the result of reckless pride and profligacy. The government ignored the advice of economists on how to handle its finances. It ridiculed the opposition and its suggestions and its concerns about where the government was going, where it was heading into deficit. It even said the notion of going into deficit was ridiculous. Suddenly it has become real; it is no longer ridiculous at all. The government frittered away the surplus with promises and programs targeted to gain votes.

The Address

This is not the time for more retail politics aimed at various groups with whom the government wants to curry favour. People who are anxious about their pensions or who have lost their jobs, whether they are in my riding of Halifax West, or in Quebec City, or Windsor or Vancouver, do not care on what side of the aisle we sit in here. They want us to do what is required, which is to protect their homes and jobs, secure their pensions, support their families and, of course, help those who need it most. That does not mean executives with fat bonuses or large corporations.

Many are concerned about what has happened on Wall Street for the past few months and the fact that there was a system of compensation which encouraged short-term thinking, that there was this deregulation in the U.S., the kind of deregulation that we have seen that party advocate for so many years. Thank goodness the Conservatives did not have a majority. Thank goodness they did not have their way with our financial institutions. Imagine the mess we would be in today if they had.

I sat down a few days ago with people who provide services to those who are struggling with poverty, new immigrants facing barriers to employment, seniors, people with disabilities and people who are losing their jobs. This meeting of groups that are serving these people was organized by health workers because these things impact people's health. When the economy is strong as we have seen, as Statistics Canada showed a couple of years ago, between 1996 and 2005 poverty actually declined in the country and there was less domestic violence. With a strong economy, good things happen. However, when we have problems, the government has to respond.

I look forward to having the opportunity to continue with questions and comments.

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague on his re-election to the House.

Part of his party's election platform advocated \$12 billion in spending cuts. I also remember that in the previous Parliament his party criticized the cuts to the GST.

My two-part question for the hon. member is very short and fairly simple.

First, does he still stand by his party's position that the GST is too low and should go back up to 7% to solve the fiscal stresses we have now?

Second, what specific programs does he suggest for the \$12 billion in cuts that his leader campaigned for in the last federal election?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, what my hon. friend is actually trying to do is to evade responsibility for the problems of the day. His party is the government. The Conservatives have formed the government once again. I congratulate him on his re-election and his party. However, the problem is that the Conservatives are the ones who have put the country in this dire situation. For two months at the beginning of the fiscal year and for the month of August, the country has been in deficit. How soon they forget.

Imagine that 10 years after we managed to climb out of deficit we would actually consider it would be so soon that a government

would come and put us in deficit even before the economy got into trouble, not because of economic recession but because of recklessness and carelessness about the future.

It is up to the government to propose solutions. We will work with the Conservatives if they are reasonable. That is important. We want to have co-operation across the House. However, we will also hold them to account and hold them responsible for their activities and their mismanagement.

• (1330)

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to those fine words. I heard about the deficit. Earlier one of the member's colleagues spoke about \$13 billion in surpluses. The House well knows from where that \$13 billion surplus came. It came on the backs of workers and employers in our country. It came from EI money.

I would like to ask the member of the greatly reduced caucus what happened to the other \$40 billion which was taken out of EI.

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. colleague on his election. It does not seem to be that he is one of those who is inclined to reduce the pettiness in the House, although I would encourage him to consider doing so.

The question of the deficit and how it was removed is one in which the NDP failed to play a positive role. In fact, every time there were measures in the House to get the economy of the country back in shape to reduce the deficit, to strengthen our economy, that party voted against them. The new member needs to do a little research and a little history. He needs to know a bit about the past of our country and what happened over the past years. When the economy strengthened, when the Liberal government got our finances in order, interest rates came down. The economy flourished. It created jobs. Poverty was reduced. People were better off.

In that situation real people benefited. Ordinary Canadian families were better off. If that is not what we are here for, then why are we here? We are here to serve people and to try to provide better conditions for every family in our country. If members fail to recognize this, they ought to reconsider why they are here.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been since 1785 when New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were one. We have had many rivalries as provinces, but there is one thing I am sure the member will agree with and that is shipbuilding is a current industry very well thought of in both provinces and Atlantic Canada in general.

I ask my friend to refer to page 7 of the Speech from the Throne which speaks about the Canadian manufacturing sector and the automotive and aerospace industries, not shipbuilding. It talks about traditional industries and does not mention shipbuilding. Does he think the government has given up on shipbuilding? Does the government think that shipbuilding is a sunset industry?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, it is very disturbing. When the government talks about industries, about high-tech industries, it fails to comprehend that shipbuilding should be listed among them. If one understood the kind of technology that goes into a modern ship these days, one would recognize this is cutting edge technology.

The Address

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start today by thanking my constituents from the bottom of my heart for their support in the past election. More than 77% chose to support me and I sincerely thank them. I appreciate the great honour they have bestowed on me once again.

I also want to thank all of those who came out to vote for other political parties, because I am concerned, as are many of us in the House, with the declining voter turnout in our country. It is an important issue for all of us. I feel somewhat embarrassed that the electorate turnout percentage in the United States was higher than it was in Canada. I am sure it is not something Canadians are proud of, and I know they will change that in the next election. I am looking forward to that, certainly.

I am in the House of Commons not only because this is an exciting and interesting job, which it certainly is, but also because there are certain things I want to do.

I am a member of the Conservative Party because I believe it represents those things better than any other political party.

Many others in the House believe in a different agenda and in approaching things differently. I am sure every member of every party believes their party can best represent what is good for this country, and I respect that. I also respect the fact that voters chose to elect each of us in the House, and I congratulate all members of the House for winning their elections. It is truly a great honour, and we have important work to do.

I know there has been a lot of talk since the last Parliament about decorum in the House and about working together. The interesting thing is that in committees and in many areas we do work together quite well. Maybe the divisions and the undesirable comments that go back and forth are not as frequent as the general public believes. It is important for us to get that message out as well.

And it is important to work together. We have been given our third minority government, and Canadians expect us to work together to make this government work. I know that the Prime Minister and the Conservative members of Parliament understand that, and I know other members do too.

We are truly blessed to live in this wonderful country of Canada. It is important to remember that the freedoms we have exist because our fathers, mothers, grandparents, great-grandparents, and the generations before them sacrificed and took initiative beyond what we can only imagine to build and develop the country we have today. It is a truly remarkable country. As Canadians we share remarkable freedoms that are shared by very few other people on the face of the earth.

We are in a time when we have to show a level of leadership and a wisdom in leadership that we have needed at very few times in history. The situations we are facing, especially in the financial markets and the economy, are very serious and will require united action. I encourage every member of the House to be a part of that and to make things work.

In my constituency the two main industries are the oil and gas sector and the agriculture sector, and they are what I want to talk about in my remaining time today.

Both of these sectors are the sources of thousands of jobs in my constituency, and both of them create jobs for others right across the country as well.

The oil and gas industry has been a driving force in providing wealth for communities in my constituency and for workers in all provinces across this country. This industry is a vibrant one. It can, has, and will continue to meet and to exceed the environmental standards expected of it.

Agriculture is the most important long-term and renewable industry in my constituency and in Canada. No industry is more important.

I was raised on a mixed farm and I am still involved in a grain farm on a crop share basis. Many of my friends and neighbours are farmers.

● (1335)

Our party cares deeply about farmers because our party has deep roots in rural communities right across Canada. I am proud of that. I am proud of what our government has done to date on agriculture over the past two and a half years. I want to talk about that.

As the member of Parliament for Vegreville—Wainwright, I have provided substantial input into many issues to do with agriculture. In our party and in our caucus we are free to do that, and many of my colleagues have provided a lot of input.

On the broader issues, of course, decisions are made by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board in cooperation with some of our incredibly capable public servants in the department.

However, many members in the House take on particular issues. These are not large issues nationally, but they are very important to individual groups and to people in certain constituencies. I want to talk a little about some of these issues.

My colleagues and I have been successful in providing control for gophers, which are one of the most devastating pests to crops and pastures in the prairie provinces in particular. Returning 2% liquid strychnine to farmers probably saves them over \$200 million a year. When we are talking about billions of dollars all the time, sometimes \$200 million does not sound like a lot, but to my friends and my neighbours and my colleagues it is important. Our government has done that because a small group of us have taken it on as an issue and lobbied for it.

We have also lobbied to extend the own-use imports program for glyphosate and expanded it to a number of other products. Under the replacement program for own-use imports, the GROU program, farmers can now import these products from the United States in particular, again saving farmers tens of millions of dollars each and every year.

We have ensured that our cattlemen can continue to bring IVOMEC across the border from the United States, saving them tens of millions of dollars a year.

The Address

Why not talk about the billions of dollars all the time and about the tens of billions of dollars that we spend on other programs? We certainly do talk about that a lot, but it is important to look at these so-called smaller issues that are critically important to a particular group of people.

I want to talk a little about what we have done over the past two years in terms of larger programs. On June 29, 2007, the federal, provincial and territorial ministers of agriculture agreed in principle on growing forward, the new policy framework for Canada's agriculture, agrifood and agri-based products industry. The vision of growing forward is a profitable and innovative agriculture, agrifood and agri-based products industry that seizes opportunities in responding to market demands and contributes to the health and well-being of Canadians.

On November 17, 2007, ministers agreed to seek the authorities to continue the APF programs for up to an additional year, starting April 1, 2008. This has made and will continue to make for a smooth transition to the growing forward program. It will provide certainty to farmers and enable them to have the voice they deserve in program design.

The first business risk management program under the new package is available under the growing forward program. It responds to farmers' demands for programs that are simple, responsive, predictable and bankable. We all know that too many of the farm programs in the past have been none of those things.

In December 2007 federal, provincial and territorial governments signed agreements to launch a new suite of business risk management programs to replace the Canadian agricultural income stabilization program, the CAIS program. The CAIS program simply did not work well. The replacement programs will come into effect for 2009. They are much better programs in many ways.

Based on input from farmers, part of the growing forward program that sets the new policy framework for Canada's agriculture, agrifood and agri-based products industry includes the AgriInvest farmer accounts; AgriStability, an improved margin-based program; AgriInsurance, which includes crop insurance and production insurance and is being expanded to include more commodities; and AgriRecovery, which is a new disaster relief framework.

AgriInvest accounts began for the 2007 program year with a \$600 million initiation program on the part of the federal government. That is being delivered as we speak today.

● (1340)

I want to talk about some of the other programs our government has put in place to help farmers build a stronger agriculture sector for the future.

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada announced that 233 research projects across Canada would receive over \$22 million in federal funding as a result of an external peer review of research proposals for 2007-08. Four review panels dealt with plant science, animal science, environment and ecology, and food science. The panels, composed of 38 expert scientists from organizations outside Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, used preliminary evaluations from 330 external experts.

These are some of the things our party has done in the first two and a half years.

When it comes to the livestock sector, in particular the cattle, hog, and elk industries, there are some serious problems today. Our government and our party have done a lot in these areas as well. I am not going to go through the list, because I can see that I am not going to have the time to do that, but these industries have certainly been affected in a very positive way by the programs we have put in place.

In spite of that, it has been a very difficult time. Since 2003, when the BSE problem led to closed borders, the cattle industry has been having serious problems. Other sectors as well have been having serious problems over a long period.

I want to talk about one program that is both an agricultural and an environmental program. That is the biofuels program.

Only six months ago people around the world were saying that we should not be investing money in the ethanol and biodiesel sectors. They were saying we should not be investing money in research to help these sectors develop because food is simply too expensive.

It is true that food is expensive at the supermarket, but the cost of the food supply in Canada is lower than the cost in any other country on earth. Only about 13% of what Canadians spend is on food.

That is a remarkable achievement, but we have seen food prices and commodity prices in agriculture drop quite dramatically over the past couple of months. They have been affected directly by the financial and economic crisis we are in today. Farmers have probably felt this crisis as much as, or more than, anybody else. For example, just six months ago farmers could have contracted canola for \$17 a bushel. Right now they are lucky to get \$9 a bushel, so we can understand the hit that farmers have taken because of the economic crisis. That is one example.

It spills over to every sector of the economy, and I recognize that. It has made things more difficult, although the grain sector is still very profitable in spite of that.

The high input cost is of great concern. One thing we have to watch in the House is that those input prices for fertilizer, pesticides, and that type of thing go down in response to the pressure on the economy, because they certainly should.

Those prices should drop along with the prices of natural gas and oil. They should drop, but we have not seen much of a drop yet. I am certainly hoping we will see further declines before spring. With declining prices and with those commodity prices at the level they have been this year, that is critical. Farmers simply are not going to make a go of it under those circumstances.

I will mention one final thing in relation to agriculture, the Canadian Wheat Board. I was delighted to see it mentioned in the Speech from the Throne.

The Address

The agriculture industry has been a consistent driver of the economy. It has created jobs on the Prairies and elsewhere across this country. Our farmers have worked tirelessly to develop a truly remarkable industry that is competitive with agriculture industries anywhere in the world. They have done remarkable things to make it work.

However, governments of the past have put in place roadblocks that really hamper the ability of certain farmers to make a profit and to make the marketing decisions they expect to make.

•(1345)

The Canadian Wheat Board monopoly is one of those roadblocks. It was put in place during the war under the War Measures Act, not to get a better price for farmers, just the opposite, but to drive the price down so government could buy grain from farmers for the war effort. Farmers accepted it at that time. Some kind of restitution was to be made but it never was and a lot of farmers at the time were upset. However, this is 2008 and we still have that monopoly in place.

Our government has committed to give farmers choice. I want to make it clear that our government has always believed in a strong Canadian Wheat Board, and we still do, but we believe that farmers deserve the same type of choices in marketing that everyone else deserves and enjoys. We simply want to give farmers the choice to market through the Wheat Board, if they so choose, or to market without going through the Wheat Board monopoly.

I am looking forward to the day when I have that option. I sell wheat, barley, canola, peas, lentils and other types of commodities. Other farmers produce them for me because, as a member of Parliament, I certainly do not have time to do that. However, I pay my portion of the inputs and I get my portion of the returns. I am looking forward next year, hopefully, to being able to choose to market through the Wheat Board or not. I believe I will continue to market some of my wheat through the Wheat Board but I at least want the choice and I may well choose to market some outside of the Wheat Board monopoly as well. That is all we are talking about.

I want to mention one other thing that affects not only agriculture but a lot of other sectors as well, and that is internal trade. I want to talk about Alberta's premier, Ed Stelmach, who has done a remarkable job in getting together, first, with the premier of British Columbia, and most recently with Brad Wall, the premier of Saskatchewan. They made great progress on eliminating those barriers to internal trade.

I want to mention that I probably was the only critic for internal trade in the history of the Canadian Parliament. I asked Preston Manning, leader of the Reform Party back in 1996, to take on the role of dealing with internal trade. At the time, the Liberal government was putting legislation through the House that was supposed to remove the barriers to internal trade. It is very weak legislation but it did pass. It was a first step. However, not enough has happened since, I am so delighted that our government, with the provinces, has taken on removing the trade barriers, which is something that must be done primarily by the provinces.

However, good leadership from the federal government can help remarkably and that is what our government has provided, along

with premiers like Brad Wall, Ed Stelmach and the premier of British Columbia. This will move across the country and we will all be better off for that.

When I was trade critic, I heard from more than half a dozen businesses that because of barriers to trade between provinces they were going to move their head offices to the United States because if they operated out of the United States they would have easier access to all of the Canadian provinces. That is a remarkable type of situation, unbelievable in a country that has signed up internationally to the free trade agreement and to NAFTA.

I again thank my constituents and the hundreds of volunteers who helped out during the campaign. Their contribution is a service to our country. They do a remarkable amount of work and are to be commended.

Finally, I want to thank my wife and my five children for helping me and for sticking with me through 15 years in federal politics. It has been a truly great honour but, as you know, Mr. Speaker, it is not a job that is easy on our families. From the bottom of my heart, I thank my wife Linda and our five children for the commitment they have made to my job as well. This is not only a commitment made by members of Parliament but our families as well.

•(1350)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I also would like to thank the voters of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who elected me to the House for the fifth time in the October 14 election. I will take my first opportunity in this House to thank the people of Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

I would like to draw attention to the speech made today by my colleague opposite, who promoted the program the government announced a few months back to help farmers who produce biofuels.

My colleague seemed to forget that although we are experiencing a financial crisis in 2008, we are also experiencing a food crisis. And this crisis is being felt around the world because of programs just like the one announced by the Conservative government a few months ago.

There was speculation on the food markets. There was also a moratorium on the production of corn-based ethanol, which I think is necessary, and which was called for by the UN.

Does my colleague agree that one of the main causes of the 2008 food crisis is the type of measure put forth by the Conservative government a few months ago, which is creating economic, financial and environmental problems?

•(1355)

[*English*]

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member opposite on his victory during the election campaign.

Statements by Members

This is one issue on which we disagree completely and wholeheartedly. This program would require that 5% of the gasoline sold in the country and 2% of diesel will be ethanol and biodiesel, which is a small portion indeed. It does give a little boost to farmers in terms of increasing their market.

I apologize not at all and never will for doing something that improves the environment and improves the situation of our farmers and our farming communities.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, want to add my voice to the comment that we want to ensure we develop agricultural policies that benefit our farmers. We are not here to develop cheap food policies. We are here to ensure our farmers, our rural society, are strong and healthy and we will do that by doing things that are great for our environment, like biofuels.

The member talked at length about how important agriculture is to his riding, as it is to mine. We know that for 13 long years trade deals were not getting done in this country. We were not reaching out and developing bilaterals to ensure our agriculture producers had opportunities to sell on a competitive basis against the Americans, the Australians and Europeans and to ensure that our products were getting into the most lucrative markets with the least amount of barriers.

The hon. member was the chair of the standing committee on trade for some time. In a matter of a couple of short years we finally had some trade deals going ahead that will benefit agriculture across the country. We also have some concerns with what is happening with the Americans right now with its COOL legislation and how that will impact our red meat industry quite negatively. Would the member comment on what his cattle and hog producers in Alberta are saying?

Mr. Leon Benoit: Mr. Speaker, I commend the member and a lot of members sitting around me today for all the hard work they have done on agriculture. Our trade minister in the last Parliament did an awful lot to negotiate deals with countries like Russia, Indonesia, Taiwan, Egypt and so on.

In the Speech from the Throne, the government made its intention very clear to expand and improve markets to the Americas, to the European Union and to Asia. Our most important trade partner is still the United States, with over 80% of our exports going to the United States. It does not like to hear rumblings of further market disruptions, which it has suffered from.

Fortunately, NAFTA works very well but, unfortunately, certain sectors do not work that well and they seem to be mostly agricultural. The softwood lumber problem, which we solved in the last Parliament, was another, but most of these are agricultural. Our farmers have been hurt dramatically and we are looking at and carefully monitoring what the new president-elect of the United States will do.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): There will be five minutes remaining after question period for further questions and comments.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand in the House to acknowledge the award recently given to the Government of Canada by the Search for Common Ground organization in Washington.

This prestigious award recognizes, in an international forum, the progress Canada has made on the road to reconciliation and, in particular, the Prime Minister's historic apology to survivors of Indian residential schools in June of this year.

We are committed to advancing reconciliation in all matters of aboriginal policy. Across the country, the Conservative government is working with provincial and territorial governments and aboriginal groups to craft new partnerships.

Although the government recognizes that the apology will not take away the sad legacy of residential schools, it does mark a new beginning, founded on renewed hope, mutual respect and trust. The apology brings aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians closer together with a new understanding of our shared past.

* * *

● (1400)

POLIO AWARENESS

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last April, I informed the House of the plans of polio survivor and Yukon resident, Ramesh Ferris, to undertake an inspirational cross-Canada trek to raise awareness of polio.

I am very pleased to announce that on October 1 he completed his 7,110 kilometre hand-cycle journey when the front wheels of his bicycle touched the Atlantic ocean in St. John's, Newfoundland. Canadians gave him over \$300,000 to help the fight against polio. He is now currently in India with Rotary International working to eradicate polio.

We can still assist Ramesh and Rotary in the success of their work. For as little as 60¢ a day, we can prevent a life of misery for children affected by polio. I ask everyone to take a moment to visit the Ramesh Ferris website, www.cycletowalk.com, and help this worthy cause.

Canadians can now add the name of Ramesh Ferris beside those of Rick Hanson and Terry Fox when they think of Canadians who embarked upon epic cross-Canada fundraising journeys and truly helped to make a difference.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today commemorates the adoption by the United Nations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. What an excellent opportunity, the day after the Speech from the Throne, to remind the government that nearly 800,000 children in Canada are living in poverty.

In times of economic slowdown, without a doubt the first victims will be the children, who will have to bear the brunt of their parents' loss of work and income. Hence the urgency to implement measures such as social and affordable housing and improvements to employment insurance.

May I take this opportunity to thank the community organizations in my riding of Saint-Lambert for their efforts in gaining recognition for children's rights.

Thanks to community activists such as these, today Quebec is the only place in Canada where there has been a constant decrease in child poverty for the past 10 years.

* * *

[English]

TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is a Trans Day of Remembrance, the day when here in Canada and around the world, members of the transsexual and transgender communities and their families, friends, co-workers and allies remember victims of transphobic violence and recommit to ensuring the full humanity and full human rights of trans people.

Trans people have too often faced violence, even to the point of death, discrimination in the workplace, in housing and in the provision of identity documents, and the denial of appropriate health care.

We celebrate the life experience of trans people and the new perspectives on gender they bring to our understanding of human diversity. To that end, the Canadian Human Rights Act must be amended to explicitly include protection from discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression. The Criminal Code must be amended so that hate crimes against trans Canadians can be prosecuted and so that judges can consider transphobic violence in sentencing.

New Democrats stand in solidarity with transsexual and transgender Canadians on this important day.

* * *

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on November 19, 1858, at Fort Langley, Governor James Douglas issued a proclamation on behalf of Queen Victoria creating the new colony of British Columbia.

Yesterday we celebrated the 150th anniversary of this historic occasion. My riding of Langley is the birthplace of B.C. and for 150

years British Columbia has been an integral part of our Confederation.

From the early days of the gold rush and maritime trade with the Orient, to the present day Asia-Pacific gateway, British Columbia continues to be an economic engine.

British Columbia has produced Nobel laureates such as Michael Smith, noted writers and artists such as Emily Carr, and two Stanley Cup champions in 1915 and 1925.

I congratulate British Columbia on its past contributions and look forward to the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. We will be cheering on our athletes as they bring Canada a gold rush on the ice and on the snow.

* * *

NATIONAL CHILD DAY

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is National Child Day, a day when Canadians acknowledge the 19th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states:

In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

One of those key interests for our children is quality accessible child care, such as the plan introduced by the previous Liberal government and shelved by the Conservative government, much to the disappointment of hundreds of thousands of Canadian families.

Today, we acknowledge the thousands of child care workers, people who work so hard to help children and their families, often for little compensation and little recognition.

Members of the Liberal caucus are wearing blue ribbons today, the symbol of child care in Canada. For the second year a not-for-profit child care organization in my riding, the Dartmouth Preschool, led by Pat Hogan, has prepared these ribbons in honour of National Child Day. We wish to thank her and all child care workers for their commitment to children in our country and throughout the world.

* * *

● (1405)

ATHENA OAKVILLE AWARD

Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today first to thank the voters of Oakville for the honour of sending me to represent them in Ottawa.

My first words in the House are made with much civic pride, to congratulate the nominees and winner of the 2008 ATHENA Oakville Award. This year five distinguished and dedicated women were nominated for their achievements in mentoring others: C.J. Martin promotes talented local artists and writers; Elka Ruth Enola is a leader in women's advocacy; Jane Thomas Yager supports cancer patients and mentors countless students; Alison Thomas mentors many individuals in the nursing profession; and Wendy Perkins, this year's winner, was recognized for her dedicated work as the co-founder and executive director of Home Suite Hope, a model organization devoted to helping the homeless by providing affordable housing and assisting them to develop new skills.

Statements by Members

These five women exemplify caring leadership. Their accomplishments have helped build our local community and our national community, and we salute them.

* * *

[Translation]

FOOTBALL

Mr. Pascal-Pierre Paillé (Louis-Hébert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will start with warm thanks to the voters of Louis-Hébert for the confidence they have shown me in the October 14 election.

I would also like to draw attention to three major sporting events that have taken place in recent days. First of all, two triumphs by football teams from the Quebec City area. Last Saturday, the Collège François-Xavier-Garneau Élans were the winners of the AAA collegiate football finals, the Bol d'or, while the Rouge et Or defeated the University of Calgary for the Uteck Cup.

My congratulations also go to the Montreal Alouettes for their win over the Edmonton Eskimos on November 16, before more than 40,000 fans.

Bravo to the players and coaching staff of these three top-notch teams. And good luck in the games coming up: the Vanier Cup game for the Rouge et Or and the Grey Cup game for the Montreal Alouettes.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I read a troubling news story this week regarding excessive and, frankly, irresponsible spending habits regarding a top CBC executive's expense account: \$10,000 for dinner tickets to a fundraiser in Montreal; \$6,000 for lunches and dinners with other CBC managers; \$7,500 on trips to Paris; \$2,300 worth of beer, wine and snacks for a reception in March for CBC employees. And the CBC said that this type of spending was totally in line with its corporate policy.

In this time of fiscal restraint, such practices do not sit well with Canadians. The Minister of Canadian Heritage is right to call for the CBC to rein in its lavish spending.

* * *

[Translation]

SIR WILFRID LAURIER DAY

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to highlight an important occasion—Sir Wilfrid Laurier Day. This is an excellent opportunity for us to remember the optimistic vision Sir Wilfrid Laurier offered Canada at the start of the 20th century and the leadership to make that vision a reality.

Under Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Canada experienced an period of unequalled wealth and significant economic growth, which established Canada as an unavoidable economic force on the international scene. As a francophone prime minister, he played a crucial role as a peacemaker between English and French Canada.

I would ask my colleagues to recognize the valuable contribution of Sir Wilfrid Laurier who, more than 100 years ago, was among those who created the country we are proud to live in today.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first I would like to thank the people of Leeds—Grenville for their support and their renewed confidence in me, and congratulate you on your re-election as Speaker.

As the government, our first duty is the safety and security of Canadians. Canada is not immune to threats to our national security.

In the Speech from the Throne we committed to tabling a national security statement, which will explain how we intend to combat threats to our national security. We will balance this with the need for accountability and the protection of civil liberties.

The national security statement is another step in a series of security reforms and investments that include a new Emergency Management Act, a Canada first defence strategy and investment in intelligence and cyber defence capacities.

National security is about preserving our economic prosperity, our core values and our quality of life.

* * *

●(1410)

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, “it's only another 5% interest hike” said the big credit card companies. “So what if it is 5% above the 18% interest rate? It's just another increase in the interchange fees every time you use your card”.

Credit card companies sucked in more than \$4.5 billion in hidden fees last year alone and increased them four times this year, yet the throne speech did nothing to address these crazy fees.

The Conservative government is happy to help banks with billions, but offers nothing to regular consumers. Canadians cannot take getting squeezed any more and neither can small businesses.

Together they started a campaign called “StopStickingItToUs.com”. They demand that government stop the credit card companies with their outrageous and unjustified charges. People cannot afford it any more.

It is time to stop credit card companies from sticking it to all of us.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the people of Saint John for allowing me to represent their interests in this House.

Oral Questions

At times like these, Canadians families review their finances to make sure they are spending prudently and they demand government do the same. That is why we ended the uncontrolled spending and wasting of taxpayer dollars that took place under the Liberals. That is why we introduced an expenditure management system to review every cent that government spends.

In the Speech from the Throne, we pledge to roll up our sleeves to further build on this work and to continue to find efficiencies in government spending.

We will review public sector compensation, ensure equalization grows in line with the economy and remains sustainable and affordable and examine corporate assets to ensure they are still performing a useful function.

Difficult but necessary decisions will be made to keep federal government spending prudent. Canadians expect no less from our government. Our government will review spending with a focus on results and ensure that every dollar spent is in the best interest of Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

TAX CREDIT FOR NEW GRADUATES

Mr. Robert Bouchard (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the previous Parliament, Bill C-207, which I introduced, reached third reading. The bill proposed a tax credit of up to \$8,000 for new graduates working in economically troubled regions.

All members of the previous Parliament, except for the Conservatives, supported this measure designed to stem the exodus of young people and to help bring skilled workers back to the regions.

This bill will be a priority for the Bloc Québécois in the coming session. That is why I am once again asking all members of the House for their support. In particular, I am asking the Conservative members from my region to set aside their party's ideology and put the interests of young people and their region first by supporting this measure. Conservatives cannot keep ignoring the regions of Quebec.

* * *

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago in the midst of a federal election campaign the Prime Minister swore that his Conservative government would never run a federal deficit. In spite of a \$16 billion surplus that the Conservatives inherited from Liberals in 2005, it now seems that the Prime Minister is poised to break his first campaign promise in less than a month.

The official excuse from the PMO will be the downturn in the global economy, but the reality is this is a deficit manufactured by the Conservatives. Despite the advice of leading economists from across the country, the Conservatives went ahead with ill-conceived economic policies that cost the federal treasury \$11 billion a year. Couple this with the largest federal spending spree in Canadian

history and we have a made in Canada fiscal disaster courtesy of the Conservative government.

It is said that history repeats itself, and once again the Liberal Party will eventually inherit a financial mess and will have to clean it up.

* * *

● (1415)

[Translation]

RIDING OF LÉVIS—BELLECHASSE

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the people of Lévis—Bellechasse and Les Etchemins for their vote of confidence, renewed on October 14, 2008.

Together, we have made considerable progress with the Davie Shipyard, which has grown from three to 1,000 employees, the new congress centre—which some Conservative caucus members visited—the Patro de Lévis, as well as investment projects in Buckland, Sainte-Justine and Saint-Anselme, to name a few.

We will continue to work on recreational and tourism projects in our region, such as the Massif du Sud project and ferry services.

Many supporters and volunteers, along with some of my family members, are here on the Hill today for this new session. I would like to sincerely thank them for their support, and assure them of my commitment and my affection for them.

In this period of global economic uncertainty, it is more important than ever to spend money responsibly. I urge all members to cooperate with our government and review all expenditures to ensure that our taxpayers' dollars are being used responsibly.

The Conservatives are maintaining a steady course towards sustainability and prosperity for all Canadians.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has taken this government less than three years to wipe out all the efforts and sacrifices made by Canadians who thought they had seen the last of federal deficits.

Will the Prime Minister admit that his budget choices, his decision to spend more than all his predecessors and his decision to eliminate the contingency reserve have brought Canada to the brink of a deficit?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, Canada has a surplus. It is the only country in the G-7, the only major industrialized nation, that has a surplus.

Oral Questions

We had a good discussion at a meeting of the G-20 leaders last week. We are agreed that our governments will do everything that is needed. I am talking about financial actions, monetary actions and even fiscal actions to improve the overall economy for Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is the one who transformed a \$13 billion surplus into a deficit. The Parliamentary Budget Officer said today:

The weak fiscal performance to date is largely attributable to previous policy decisions as opposed to weakened economic conditions—

Will the Prime Minister admit that even though his government is ideologically conservative, it is certainly not fiscally conservative?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, this is one of the very few industrial countries that remains in a surplus position.

It is correct that the surplus is weaker than it was in the past because the government took deliberate action to provide long-term tax stimulus to the economy as the economy was slowing. That was the right fiscal decision and it was supported by Canadians. We will take additional fiscal stimulus measures, as we agreed at the G-20, if necessary.

Anybody who would say that in the midst of a global recession they would turn around and raise taxes or cut essential spending, that would be an ideological position that the government has no intention of following.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if he saw that coming, why then did he eliminate the contingency reserve? It does not make sense.

[Translation]

Income trusts? A promise broken. The Atlantic accord? A promise broken. Fixed election dates? A promise broken. No deficit? A promise broken, just as this Parliament opened.

How can Canadians, who are worried about their savings, their jobs and their pensions, believe this prime minister, who is constantly going back on his word and ignoring the principles of sound economic management?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this question has to do with the election, and the voters have made their decision.

[English]

I do not think it serves the Leader of the Opposition, or anybody else, to fight the last election over again.

The fact of the matter is that we put our economic plan clearly before Canadians. They know that we took measures to stimulate this economy deliberately. They can be assured that we will take whatever measures are necessary to protect the Canadian economy in difficult times. I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to provide specifically his ideas about what those best measures might be.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me continue the line of questioning of our leader.

[Translation]

During the election campaign, with full knowledge of the official forecasts, the Prime Minister said it would be stupid and dangerous to plunge the country into a deficit. Those were his own words.

Since the election, he has changed his tune. Today, the parliamentary budget officer predicted a Conservative deficit over several years.

Why did the Prime Minister clearly mislead Canadians about the deficit?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what the Parliamentary Budget Officer actually said today is that it is important, given the downgraded economic outlook, to have this discussion and to look at assumptions.

As the member opposite knows, the fall economic update is about to be delivered. We will be setting out our own economic forecast as well as those of the private forecasters in the update which we will deliver I hope in the House of Commons at four o'clock next Thursday, November 27.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister is guilty of selective reading of that report. What that report very clearly said was that first of all, we are going into deficit; second, we are not going into deficit because of world or Canadian economic conditions. We are going into deficit because of actions and decisions made by the government. That is what he said. It is the spending of the contingency reserve. It is the wild and reckless spending by the government which now has nowhere to hide.

Will the minister admit that he has nowhere to hide, that the deficit belongs to him and his reckless policies, and nobody else?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to extend the same warm welcome back to the House of Commons to the member for Markham—Unionville who is masking his spirit of cooperation well in his initial questions.

Surely, the hon. member knows that we are going through a very serious global economic downturn. Canada is very well positioned compared to our G-7 allies and relative to other economies. But the seriousness of this situation is not to be underestimated and I would hope that the member opposite would rise above partisan gamesmanship.

* * *

[Translation]

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne presented by the Conservatives has proven to be a great disappointment. We had been promised concrete actions to deal with the financial crisis, but instead were presented with a throne speech of imprecise and limited content.

Oral Questions

When the situation is urgent, when the manufacturing and forestry sectors are in great difficulty, when thousands of workers are losing their jobs and pensioners are seeing their savings dwindle away, how can the Prime Minister explain his insensitivity to the effects of the crisis on people and on the economy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is rather odd to fault a throne speech for being a throne speech. The reality is that this government has taken numerous steps in these areas to improve investment potential and to create jobs. In the Speech from the Throne we have said that the government will seek other measures. The government is, of course, still prepared to listen to suggestions from the Bloc and from other members of this House.

•(1425)

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as well as proposing no solutions whatsoever, the Prime Minister demonstrates a total lack of understanding of Quebec priorities and values. He persists in making cuts to culture and to funding for not for profit organizations and those concerned with economic development; he persists with his desire to impose repressive legislation on young offenders; he persists in his desire to create a Canada-wide securities commission, and I could go on and on.

Does the Prime Minister not get it and did he learn nothing from the last election in Quebec?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's current world position is stronger than that of the major industrialized powers. This government intends to pursue policies in order to maintain and improve its position in the current global economy. I repeat, we are seeking ideas and are open to those from the other parties in Parliament, while the Minister of Finance is in the process of preparing his next budget.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has managed to rally all of Quebec against his throne speech because it marginalizes Quebec and does not meet the needs of the victims of the financial and economic crisis. Does the Prime Minister want some ideas? For example, he could have announced improvements to employment insurance by abolishing the two-week waiting period, which would cost nothing at all.

Is this not proof of the government's insensitivity to the fate of thousands of workers whose jobs are currently in jeopardy because of the financial crisis?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are always saddened when people lose their jobs anywhere in Canada. It is a very serious matter and that is why we have expanded the employment insurance system in Canada. For example, we now have five pilot projects to examine ways to improve the system and we will be expanding the program in other ways.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne is more proof of the Conservative government's insensitivity towards the difficulties experienced by Quebecers and Canadians.

How else do you explain the total silence about the problems faced by retirees who have watched their savings evaporate, placed

in jeopardy by the stock market crisis and the lack of solutions in the throne speech? It is indifference and insignificance.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, quite the contrary. The throne speech lists all the measures we will use. We have already implemented several measures to help laid-off workers.

[*English*]

For example, we broadened compassionate care benefits. As well, we are continuing with the pilot projects. Some of that funding has been extended considerably, specifically to help those who find themselves in very difficult transition stages. We believe that the best social measures are to get people new jobs and we are helping them do that.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada is on the edge of a recession. Stock markets have plummeted 40%, personal bankruptcy is up 20% and the unemployment rate will reach 7% next year. The Speech from the Throne shows that the government is staying the course, a course that is taking us towards recession and that is failing families.

Why is there no economic stimulation? Why are there no job creation plans?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it has been clear since the election that the economy of the industrialized world is in recession. Canada is in a much better position than the great majority of these countries. And we have every intention of taking the necessary steps to maintain this position.

As I just said, I invite the other parties to give us ideas. But, we are in a better position than many other countries and we plan on keeping it that way.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we presented our ideas and the government did not accept them. What can I say?

The auto sector is the backbone of our manufacturing sector here in Canada. In fact, because it is such a large and integrated industry, it affects the lives of millions of Canadians, their families and their communities.

The U.S. Congress today is making distinct progress toward an assistance package that is about to be adopted. It looks like the last excuse that the government has had for not taking any action to protect the auto sector is gone.

Will the Prime Minister tell us today in the House when he will bring forward action to assist the ailing auto sector here in Canada, put our people back to work, and fix the situation we are facing right now?

•(1430)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I have to express a little bit of disappointment when some in the opposition oppose even a broad statement of principle. I think that really speaks of just opposing for the sake of opposing.

Oral Questions

When it comes to the auto sector the Minister of Industry is in the United States now. We are obviously watching what the Americans are doing with great interest. In the end of course, Canada will take its own decisions. Those decisions will be in the best interests not just of the auto sector but of the entire Canadian economy and of course Canadian taxpayers.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that reckless corporate tax cuts have brought the country to the situation where its fiscal capacity is severely constrained. Faced with a deficit of billions of dollars, what is the government choosing to do? It is choosing to give more tax cuts to those who need it the least and it is refusing to step forward with assistance for those companies that need help. Besides, it is leaving a lot of people falling by the wayside as it does it.

After years of railing against deficits, how can the Prime Minister justify using taxpayers' dollars for deeper corporate tax cuts when he does nothing for jobs nor fix the—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the election campaign this government made very clear its intention to keep reducing taxes for businesses and individuals. We want a mandate. I would point out that not just the Conservative Party supported that position on business taxes but so did the Liberal Party.

The vast majority of the Canadian public understands that we cannot improve the performance of the economy by raising taxes on profitable business. That is not a position this government will take.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the previous Liberal government put in place a contingency reserve, a rainy day fund, to protect Canadians during times of economic downturn. Now the Conservatives have foolishly squandered that fund.

The Prime Minister said that back in August 2007 he could see a global downturn on the way.

If the Prime Minister could actually foresee storm clouds on the horizon, why did he permit his finance minister to eliminate Canada's rainy day fund?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also welcome back the member for Kings—Hants who has been re-elected on behalf of one party or another.

We are proud of our record of three balanced budgets. As the member will know, because he was here, in the October 2007 economic statement we brought in far-reaching tax reductions, particularly in the business sector for small and medium-sized businesses, running out to 2012. We are being joined in that by a majority of the provinces. That is a stimulus for the Canadian economy.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the budget officer of the House of Commons said specifically in his report that "Previous policy decisions as opposed to weakened economic conditions" have caused this looming deficit. He

specifically blamed bad Conservative tax and reckless spending policies.

When will the Minister of Finance admit that having conceived these bad policies he is responsible for fathering the Conservative deficit and, as such, he has earned the title of Canada's new deficit daddy?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): I am not going to go there, Mr. Speaker.

Some hon. members: Who's your daddy?

The Speaker: Order, please. Just because the member for Kings—Hants used the name does not mean that everybody has to use it at the same time. We need to have some order so we can hear the Minister of Finance in his reply.

• (1435)

Hon. Jim Flaherty: It is difficult, Mr. Speaker, to take this sort of suggestion from that particular member.

Under the Liberal government, spending grew an average of 8.3% annually over its last five years. In fact, in the Liberal government's last year, spending grew by 14.8% and then it had the so-called surprise surpluses at the end of every year which it would treat as if it were Liberal money and not taxpayer money every year with its March madness spending.

It is not surprising that the Liberals confuse taxpayer money with Liberal Party moneys. It has happened before.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Canada has now confirmed that the likelihood of Canada being in a recession is around the corner. With consumer prices plummeting in the United States at record rates, deflation is also looming. Yesterday, however, the minister suggested that his economic statement coming next week would include no new stimulus action plan.

At a time when we need real action, when will we hear and when will Canadians hear from the minister what his plan actually is?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, surely it is passing strange when one member of the official opposition gets up and says that we spend too much and then the next member gets up and says that we are not spending enough.

I know there is an economic team over there that will get together and talk about this and come up with a theme and some suggestions. When they do, and I mean this in a cooperative way, I would love to hear their suggestions about the manner in which we can stimulate the economy.

The G-20 leaders and the G-20 finance ministers agreed on that.

This is a serious situation and we welcome their suggestions.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the last time I checked that was the government and we need to hear its action plan.

The fact is that there was a 25% increase in spending over four years and look at where we are. We are about to walk into a deficit.

[Translation]

The Speech from the Throne does not mention any plans to protect retirees or any help for seniors who will be forced to withdraw up to 40% of their RRIFs to be able to pay their taxes.

Where is the minister's plan to protect retirees and help seniors get through this crisis?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will respond to the specific question about seniors. One specific concern that has been raised is the obligation that people have to move money from RRSPs to RRIFs at age 71. We moved the age from 69 to 71. It is true that the transfer can be made in kind. One does not have to sell the asset. However, it is also true that some of our financial institutions have not been making that crystal clear to their customers.

I am writing to them today asking them to clarify that and to ensure those transfers in kind can be made within those financial institutions at no cost to the customers.

* * *

[Translation]

SECURITIES COMMISSION

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to understand why the Minister of Finance would insist on setting up a single securities commission even though the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously opposed the plan and an OECD analysis showed the existing regime to be among the best in the world.

Why does the Minister of Finance want to dismantle a system that is working well? Is he making up excuses to further concentrate financial power in Toronto?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we believe that the constitutional jurisdictions of each level of government must be respected. Setting up a panel of experts to advise the government on how to proceed is a necessary measure that will lay the foundation for future dialogue. We expect to receive Mr. Hockin's report in January.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the OECD considers Canada's existing passport system for securities to be one of the most secure in the world, and the European Union even has a similar system.

Instead of making things up to justify changing a system that works well, will the minister admit that what he really wants to do is concentrate what is left of Quebec and the provinces' financial autonomy in Toronto?

• (1440)

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, any new system would respect regional differences in Canada.

In the course of the past year, we have had to deal with the non-bank backed, asset backed commercial paper issue. It is not yet finalized. This is a serious issue involving \$32 billion or \$33 billion of Canadians' money.

Oral Questions

The regulation was the responsibility largely of the provinces and the territories, not the Government of Canada, but who gets called upon in crises is the Government of Canada to deal with these issues on behalf of Canadians. This is a gap in our system of regulation that the crisis that we are going through points out it is necessary to fill.

* * *

[Translation]

CULTURE

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, faced with the outcry prompted by the cuts to cultural programs, the former Minister of Heritage made a clumsy attempt to smooth things over by promising that the programs that had been eliminated would be replaced. Now the new Minister of Heritage is saying that those programs will not be replaced. And on top of that, the Speech from the Throne speaks volumes in its silence on this subject.

Can the Prime Minister explain why he is continuing to deny the arts and cultural communities the resources they need, when this is a dynamic industry and one that is essential to the economy?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the accusation made by the member opposite is completely false. In the past, during our first term, our government increased spending on arts and culture by 8%. We spend \$3.2 billion on arts and culture in this country. In the past, the Bloc Québécois voted against those increases. They were the ones who voted against them. We have increased them in the past. We are accountable to the taxpayers and it was the Bloc who voted against artists, not us.

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the increases in heritage spending went to sports, and cultural industries actually got a \$45 million cut.

When you attack culture and artists in this way, you attack the very foundations of the Quebec nation. Culture is certainly not negligible in economic terms. It provides 314,000 jobs in Quebec, and it produces nearly \$85 billion in economic benefits in Canada, accounting for 7.4% of GDP.

Once again, why this attack on an industry that is so important to the economy?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are not attacking anything. We have increased spending by 8%. Her statement that we gave that money to sports is false. That is false. We gave that money to the torch relay so that francophone communities outside Quebec could be involved in the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games. That is because we understand that there are francophones outside Quebec. We, a national party, are the ones who understand Quebec, who understand Canada, and who understand francophones in all regions of this country.

Oral Questions

[English]

MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government's persistent lack of urgency in coming to the aid of our manufacturers is yet another example of its poor management of our economy. Many of the 160,000 lost jobs could have been avoided if only the government were not so stubborn in its refusal to act on the workers' behalf.

What is it about the government, those members and the Prime Minister that makes them refuse to act to help families and workers when their jobs are in jeopardy?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have acted, of course. We acted well over a year ago. The cumulative effect on the economy is 1.4% of GDP stimulus this year. Some of the provinces have joined us in reducing taxes on businesses. Next year the stimulus in the economy will be about 2%.

To put that in context, that is among the highest in the G-7 in terms of the stimulus we have already built into the economy structurally. This is very important for businesses. We will have the federal business tax rate to 15% by 2012. Many of the provinces will get to 10% by then. That is a 25% business tax rate. That is a great way to brand Canada, attract investment—

• (1445)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the workers in St. Catharines and Oakville are very happy with that answer. Canada knows that the government's past decisions have put several nails in the coffin of the forestry industry and now the government's poor fiscal management has paralyzed it in the face of the problems and the challenges facing our manufacturers.

Today the U.S. senate is putting forward concrete proposals to help auto workers in that country. Why is it, what it is about the government and what will it take to make it finally act to protect manufacturers, jobs and workers in this country where that sector is even more important?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Geography is important, too, Mr. Speaker. In fact, St. Catharines re-elected a Conservative member. Oakville, the home of Ford Motor Company, elected a Conservative member. The good people of Oshawa re-elected a Conservative member. We have acted with respect to the auto industry over the years, which is why there is a—

The Speaker: The time has expired.

The hon. member for Honoré-Mercier.

* * *

[Translation]

FINANCE

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the governments of France, Great Britain, the United States, and even China, did not waste any time when the current crisis began. They quickly took decisive action to safeguard their economy, in order to protect savings and workers. What did our government do? Absolutely nothing. They were asleep at the switch, so to speak.

In the spirit of openness and cooperation, we will give them another chance. Will they introduce a plan now?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): As I said a moment ago, Mr. Speaker, in the first two and a half years of our government we created a stimulus that this year alone in the Canadian economy is \$21 billion, which is 1.4% of GDP. This is not a temporary stimulus as the Americans did. All that accomplished in the United States was one-quarter of significant real GDP growth and then it fell down badly in the next quarter.

We have not seen that in Canada. What we have seen is the influence in our real economy of those tax policies. This is not the time to increase the GST, as the Leader of the Opposition suggested this morning. This is not the time to raise taxes. We have lowered taxes and we are going to keep them low to encourage—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Honoré-Mercier.

[Translation]

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the past is any indication, let us see where we stand. They started by betraying our forestry workers; they signed a sellout agreement that was a disaster; and members will remember when the Conservatives were boasting about the strength of the dollar, while our paper mills and manufacturing companies were shutting down. Then, they decided to cut subsidies for our artists. Now, shows are being cancelled and jobs have been lost.

So, the question is: what sectors of the economy will they go after now?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course the goal is to have increasing economic growth in Canada. I say to the member opposite, this is a serious situation. It is a serious situation in Canada, as well. If any members in the House have any constructive suggestions of ways in which the economy could be stimulated in addition to the tax reductions that we have already made, then I welcome them. Quite frankly, I think that is what Canadians expect of us when we come back after an election in a time of serious economic slowdown.

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a time of economic uncertainty, in a time when Canadians are having to watch their pocketbooks closely and to manage their own household spending carefully, would the President of the Treasury Board tell the House what this Conservative government is doing to demonstrate leadership with respect to responsible spending practices and fiscal restraint?

Oral Questions

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we committed in budget 2007 to fundamentally change the way government operates. Over the last two years we have implemented a new approach to government spending to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent as carefully and as effectively as possible. In fact, we have reviewed 17 federal organizations over the last year resulting in \$180 million of savings. A second round of reviews is now under way. These reviews ensure that government programs provide value for money and are focused on Canadians' priorities. Canadians expect no less.

* * *

• (1450)

[Translation]

PARLIAMENTARY BUDGET OFFICER

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign, the Prime Minister stated loud and clear that the parliamentary budget officer is an independent position. However, there are some people here, in the highest circles, who want to silence him.

If the Prime Minister is sincere, is he ready to defend this institution by proposing legislative amendments to guarantee his independence, without interference?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we created an independent position. But this position was approved by Parliament, which is responsible for managing it.

[English]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unlike the Minister of Finance, Mr. Kevin Page, the Parliamentary Budget Officer, is here to tell Canadians the truth about the economy.

If the Prime Minister truly believes that an order-in-council appointee can be bossed around by other people, perhaps it is time for a change. Why, in that case, does the Prime Minister not help us fix the accountability act immediately by bringing forward legislation to guarantee his independence for the future?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member of one simple fact. It was this government and this party that created the position of Parliamentary Budget Officer. We believe in accountability in the way in which the numbers are accounted for and made public to the Canadian taxpayer. It was our party that promised this in the 2005 and 2006 elections. It is a promise that we made and a promise that we kept. We will continue to go forward with this method of accountability that is brand new to Parliament.

* * *

[Translation]

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the new Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec) has said that he would review the funding of not for profit economic organizations that had their funding cut by his predecessor.

Incidentally, I must congratulate the Prime Minister for relieving the former incumbent of his responsibilities.

Can the Minister of State, who is also responsible for the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region, give us confirmation that he will be restoring funding to these organizations?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the seriousness of yesterday's Speech from the Throne is proof of how very seriously our government takes the global economic downturn.

I have been with Economic Development Canada for three weeks. In our program analyses we will naturally take the time to examine, with respect to current world economic conditions, how the tools can best serve the regions of Quebec. And that is my commitment: to serve the regions of Quebec, and serve them well.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while the minister is taking his time, the economic situation continues to worsen. I will give him one specific example from my region: Rimouski's Technopole maritime du Québec has suffered cuts.

Does the Minister of State realize that he is harming regional economic development and depriving Quebec of the expertise in a leading-edge sector by not restoring the funding of these organizations now?

Hon. Denis Lebel (Minister of State (Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the number of Bloc Québécois members here in the House and their reaction to the throne speech proves how little impact they have on the decisions reached by the government and on the outcome. We will continue to do our job and to improve the economy in the regions of Quebec.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whenever things go wrong for the government, it blames the public service. The throne speech calls for legislation and for private sector delivery of services. I am sure public servants will want to know if they are to be unemployed due to the bad management by the government. Tell them now. What is to be legislated and which services are to be privatized?

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have no intention of privatizing the public sector. We already work extensively with the private and not-for-profit sectors to offer services to Canadians. Our priority is to ensure that government programs operate effectively and provide value for money. To that end, we will continue to explore opportunities to make sure that Canadians get the best possible value for their tax dollar.

Oral Questions

●(1455)

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, no answer.

The President of the Treasury Board is currently in negotiations with the public service but we know what he thinks of negotiations. He would rather dictate. For the public servants involved, it is simply take it or leave it. That is not negotiating, it is dictating.

Will the government make a commitment now, in good faith, to engage in frank and transparent negotiations on all aspects of the contracts?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we value our public servants. They understand that public service compensation must reflect Canada's economic situation. Our approach is a balanced one. This is about fairness, fairness to the employees and to the Canadian taxpayers. We will continue to work with our public servants.

* * *

[Translation]

FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of workers in northern Ontario, such as those in Smooth Rock Falls, Hearst, Dubreuilville, White River and Wawa, have no more job prospects.

Thanks to this government, the forestry industry is an economic engine that has stalled. Families in northern Ontario need economic measures and ample investments so that both the unemployed and the youth can find work in our region.

Now that FedNor has been marginalized in cabinet, what measures are in place to help northern Ontario's economy?

[English]

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government understands that these are difficult times for the forestry industry workers in affected communities from coast to coast. As noted in the Speech from the Throne, we are taking steps to ensure the long-term competitiveness of this sector. We are investing in innovation. We are expanding market opportunities. We have created the forest sector council. We know the challenges are great. That is why we have taken such decisive action.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is not just northern Ontario where the government is failing working families. In fact, in southern Ontario, the heart of the manufacturing sector of this country, the government is failing working families and working people.

In the last few months alone in the town of Welland we have seen the decimation of jobs at John Deere. The Conservative tax cuts simply let John Deere be more profitable and then those jobs headed to Mexico. What we need is a stimulus package and we need it now.

We need to create jobs. We need training and apprenticeship opportunities for our children. We need to ensure fairness in employment insurance for all workers across this country. When will we see it?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to that question by reading a statement.

During question period today we have heard a lot of rhetoric, but it is important to understand that our leader is the envy of the world in terms of the way he is approaching the economic situation.

In July, the London *Telegraph* wrote, concerning the economies of the G-8:

Of all the leaders, only [the Prime Minister]...is able to point to a popular and successful record in office...the Canadian Tories are a model of how to behave during a downturn...If the rest of the world had comported itself with similar modesty and prudence, we might not be in this mess.

* * *

SECURITIES INDUSTRY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton—Leduc, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the current market crisis has shown the importance of prudent financial regulations.

While Canada's banking sector has been assessed as the world's strongest, our securities framework has been criticized by investors, businesses and international institutions as fragmented, cumbersome and ineffective. In the words of the IMF, "Canada is currently the only G-7 country without a common securities regulator, and Canada's investors deserve better".

Will the Minister of Finance explain what our government is prepared to do to address this situation?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while Canada's financial system is the soundest in the world, the credit crisis, the financial crisis, certainly since last year has demonstrated one glaring deficiency in our system of regulation in Canada, and that is the absence of a national securities regulator.

This is not an academic subject. This matters to seniors, to people with investments, mutual funds, to families, to Canadians from coast to coast to coast. Therefore, we are going to move forward toward a common national securities regulator for Canada with willing partners in the provinces and willing participants.

* * *

●(1500)

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the auto sector has greatly suffered from the government's poor management of the economy and chronic neglect.

Oral Questions

Guelph's economy is dependent upon the good jobs that come from a prosperous automotive and auto parts industry. Under the Conservatives, tens of thousands of good jobs have been lost, a situation that could have been avoided if they had a plan.

While the minister is on the road without a plan, auto workers are on the streets without a job. When will we see some real action?

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that the global auto industry is facing unprecedented circumstances and the North American integrated automotive industry is no different.

The situation is changing daily. The minister is down in the U.S. right now talking to stakeholders. He has met with stakeholders here in Canada over the past couple of weeks.

The solution here needs to be a carefully considered one with a long-term view to the interests of Canadian consumers, Canadian workers, Canadian businesses and Canadian taxpayers. Any decision taken will be carefully considered in that regard.

* * *

[Translation]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Speech from the Throne proposes no changes to help the environment. Worse still, the Conservative government seems to want to retain its plan for greenhouse gas emissions, a plan that has been criticized.

Does the minister realize that he is going against a majority of Quebecers who want the reference year to be 1990, as in the Kyoto protocol, not 2006, and that his Conservative ideology is hurting Quebec's economic development and its manufacturing sector, just so he can please the oil and gas companies?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate all members. We are prepared to work with all members of the House of Commons.

We have reiterated our intention to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and President-elect Obama has already confirmed that he intends to do the same. I think the Bloc Québécois, the President-elect and the Government of Canada are all on the same page. I sincerely hope so.

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as an Albertan, I was horrified to learn yesterday of the government's plans to destroy the very foundation of federal environmental protection. At the same time it is fast-tracking the extraction of fossil fuels, including in our fragile Arctic.

The government has been given no mandate to abandon the careful work to protect our environment. I ask the minister to explain to this House why he is embarking on this dangerous course.

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the hon. member to the House as an Albertan and as an Albertan I feel it is our responsibility in government to balance the environment and the economy.

In the time ahead there is the dynamic of a new president elected in the United States, one who has spoken with clarity and determination about environmental policies. In addition, in the coming year at Copenhagen, the world community will deal with an international protocol to supersede the Kyoto protocol.

I invite my hon. friend to work with us. If she has constructive ideas about this, I welcome them.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State (Democratic Reform). Earlier this week, the government of Saskatchewan introduced legislation that would give the people of Saskatchewan a democratic voice in the upper chamber. Yesterday, during the throne speech, the government highlighted its commitment to Senate reform.

Could the minister indicate whether the federal government supports the initiative taken by Saskatchewan? Could he also indicate how the Conservative government intends to implement its commitments to reform in the upper chamber?

• (1505)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has congratulated the government of Saskatchewan for its historic step in allowing the people of Saskatchewan to take a proactive role in consulting the people of Saskatchewan in who should represent them.

We believe we should ensure that our institutions are in line with the 21st century. That is why we will introduce legislation to allow Canadians to have a say in who will represent them in the Senate. We will introduce legislation to limit the terms to eight years in the upper House and we will ensure that they—

* * *

EQUALIZATION

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, less than a year ago the government legislated a second equalization formula for Nova Scotia and Newfoundland, which includes a locked-in, guaranteed 3.5% annual increase for every year until 2020. However, the throne speech indicates that a cap may be applied to limit equalization increases.

Will the Minister of Finance assure Nova Scotia and Newfoundland that they will receive the full 3.5% guaranteed increase every year, even if the economy as a whole increases only 1% or even zero?

Business of the House

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when I met with my provincial and territorial colleagues some weeks ago, we provided them with the equalization numbers for next year, including, regrettably, the province of Ontario. We made it clear that equalization itself, leaving aside other aspects of transfers to the provinces, would not grow faster than the rate of growth in the economy, that is nominal GDP. The ministers, while not welcoming that, understood that in a time of a financial crisis we cannot have a program like equalization growing on average at about 15% per annum.

* * *

[Translation]

POINT OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to deal with something that happened during question period. I would like to know if there was a problem with interpretation when my colleague and House Leader of the Bloc Québécois, the member for Joliette, asked a supplementary question. My colleague was directing a question to the Minister of Finance on retirees who are worried about their savings literally evaporating because of the economic crisis and it was the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development who gave us a canned answer about employment insurance. Her reply had nothing to do with the question about retirees' savings directed to the Minister of Finance.

[English]

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the hon. member, having been in the chamber for quite some time and being the opposition whip for the Bloc Québécois, is well aware of the Standing Orders. It is the government that decides who gets up to answer which questions.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this has to do with House business. I would be interested to have from the government House leader his forecast of the agenda going forward.

As I ask him this question, the first time I have had to ask the so-called Thursday question in this new Parliament, I want to congratulate the government House leader on his new appointment and hope that the relationship among House leaders is one that works well as we go forward.

Could he provide to the House the information that is usually given about the game plan for next week? I note that the Minister of Finance indicated a certain time for the economic statement next Thursday afternoon at four o'clock. I wonder if that means that what remains of the throne speech debate would carry over then into the Friday of next week. Could the House leader tell us if that is his intention?

Specifically, on the economic statement, could he indicate if a decision has been taken yet as to whether the statement will be delivered in a parliamentary committee, or in the House in

committee of the whole, or as a statement by a minister or in some other venue altogether?

Could he also say whether there will be a briefing provided to members of the opposition before the presentation of the statement so it can be treated with the seriousness that it deserves, given the gravity of Canadian economic circumstances at the present time?

• (1510)

Hon. Jay Hill (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also congratulate the official opposition House leader for his reappointment to that position. I look forward to working with him and the House leaders of the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party in the days, weeks, months and hopefully years ahead as we work productively on the part of Canadians in this 40th Parliament.

I will get to quite a number of questions that the hon. member had in relation to the economic and fiscal update later on in my short statement.

First, Mr. Speaker I thank you and congratulate you on being re-elected to serve this House as our Speaker. I also congratulate all members of Parliament who were fortunate enough to be given the opportunity by their voters to serve their constituents in this 40th Parliament. I believe it is a great honour to be given that trust and we must be mindful of how we keep that trust and conduct ourselves accordingly.

I want to reassure you, Mr. Speaker, that you will have my cooperation in your efforts to run a smooth and productive House of Commons. I trust that all members will work together in an effort to bring more civility to our debates. I am greatly encouraged at the demeanour and the decorum that we witnessed today in the question period. I do not know whether it was evident to viewers watching the telecast at home, but the noise level was considerably lower than when we left last June.

Hopefully, and I mean this sincerely, all parties and all 308 members will work diligently to ensure that that continues to be the case. Perhaps we can even build on that and truly bring a new level and degree of civility to our chamber.

Today through next Thursday the government will be communicating its commitment to provide strong leadership during these difficult times through the debate on the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

Due to a special order adopted earlier today, we will be voting at the end of the day Monday on the subamendment to the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne. The plan would then be to vote on the amendment on Tuesday and dispose of the main question on Thursday, November 27.

Hopefully this will be accomplished by adopting the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne because this will be a confidence matter.

As the finance minister announced today, the economic fiscal update will be delivered on Thursday, November 27 at 4:00 p.m. It is our hope that the statement will be delivered in the House, but I would indicate for all my House leader colleagues that the details are open to negotiation.

The Address

I am very pleased with the relationship that we have developed so far and I will be looking for their co-operation to see that the finance minister could deliver this at the appropriate time in the chamber. I will be working with them to work out all the details to that.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[*English*]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Speaker: Before question period, the hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright had the floor for questions and comments. There are five minutes remaining in the time allotted for them consequent on the hon. member's speech. Questions or comments.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Joliette.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that I will be sharing my time with the member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, who is also a friend.

I would like to begin this debate on the Speech from the Throne by giving special thanks to the voters in my riding of Joliette, who placed their trust in me for a fourth time in eight years. Every two years I receive their continued support. I would also like to congratulate all the members in this house who were re-elected and also given a vote of confidence by their fellow citizens. I can assure those who voted for me that I will continue to work hard to represent them and to defend the interests of Quebec. It is in that regard that I will be approaching this debate on the throne speech delivered yesterday by the Governor General.

I would also like to point out that not only did the voters of the riding of Joliette place their trust in a Bloc Québécois candidate, but the vast majority of voters in Quebec ridings elected Bloc Québécois members. We have 49 Bloc Québécois MPs, which represents almost two thirds of the Quebec representatives in this House.

It is important to remember that during the election campaign, two visions clashed during the election debate: the vision of Quebec espoused by the Bloc Québécois—a number of consensuses that came out of unanimous decisions by the National Assembly of Quebec, as well as broad general consensuses—and the Conservative vision that led to positions that are much more right-wing and much further from Quebec's values and interests.

In recent days and weeks, the Prime Minister, some government ministers and the government leader talked about this apparent willingness to work with the opposition. It is therefore extremely surprising, on reading the throne speech, to see that the government and the Prime Minister did not use any of the suggestions made by the Bloc Québécois, even though these suggestions stem from the choice Quebeckers made on October 14.

It is therefore extremely surprising that the minority government did not take note of the fact that 78% of Quebeckers who were entitled to vote voted for parties other than the Conservative Party. As I said, it is especially surprising because, in the days leading up to the throne speech, the Conservatives indicated that they wanted to cooperate and would listen to suggestions from the opposition parties.

Obviously, I speak for the Bloc Québécois, but I believe that all the opposition parties can see that the throne speech in no way reflects any of the ideas expressed by the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, obviously by the Bloc Québécois—and I will come back to this—or by the leader of the New Democratic Party.

Why is it that in his throne speech, the Prime Minister did not use any of the proposals made by the Bloc Québécois, which is the leading federal party in Quebec? This shows a closed-mindedness, a lack of openness, that is hard to account for and, in my opinion, does not bode well for the future.

Earlier, the government House leader said that he thought the noise level was considerably lower. Maybe it was lower than at the end of the previous Parliament, but I think the partisanship we see from the Conservative members and caucus is not much different from what we saw during the last question period before the election.

This is very worrisome. The first thing that the Bloc Québécois leader and the other opposition party leaders suggested was for the government to adopt a much more conciliatory tone. But this tone was not evident in the throne speech or in the attitude of government members, particularly during today's question period.

• (1515)

I find this very worrisome.

What topics came up during the election debates in that 33-day election campaign? I will list them, because it seems that the topics discussed in Quebec were perhaps not discussed the same way in the Canadian nation. So it might be good for those watching at home and for my colleagues from across Canada to hear about what was discussed during the election campaign in Quebec.

First of all, of course, there was the crisis in the manufacturing and forestry sectors. As we know, for several months, if not years, Quebec has been experiencing a major crisis in the manufacturing sector, which has led to the loss of several thousand jobs. I would like to remind members about a particular table. I bring this up because the government, especially the Minister of Finance, often tends to forget its own documents. On page 28 of the October 2007 economic statement, there was a lovely table that showed five Canadian industries that are declining. Since 2005, only one sector has been growing: the petrochemical, oil and hydrocarbon sector.

The Address

The government should have realized something was wrong way back in October 2007. The Bloc Québécois repeatedly suggested ways to help and support the manufacturing and forestry industries. Unfortunately, the government ignored us, and the only thing it did was lower taxes on profits, which, may I remind the House, only helps those companies that make a profit. As I was saying, when an industry is in decline, companies are not usually making a profit. The government has been congratulating itself on this measure for months, not to mention during the election campaign, but Quebeckers are not buying it.

I would like to comment on another Conservative government decision in the same vein: the infamous community foundation or community trust—I do not remember exactly what it was called—that gave a certain amount of money to all of the provinces and Quebec. That billion-dollar trust was not much considering the problems that needed solving. Quebec got about \$280 million, if I remember correctly. That was the second thing the Conservatives did. Unfortunately Alberta received 10 times more money per lost job than Quebec. The Bloc Québécois pointed out that this was unfair to Quebec, as did regional and economic stakeholders. Because of the government's unfairness, Quebeckers were extremely dissatisfied with the Conservatives' solutions.

Then came the cuts to culture in August, just a few weeks before the election was called. Those cuts were made because of the Conservatives' narrow, commercial ideas about culture. I like to point out that sometimes, as in the free trade agreement between Canada, the United States and Mexico, the word “culture”, which has extremely rich connotations in French, is often translated into English as “entertainment”. That is how the Conservative government sees culture: as entertainment. The government is just not interested in giving money to ballet companies so they can show off their skills.

That same attitude resurfaces when it comes to regional development, young offenders and the environment. I am sure that my colleague from Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie will have more to say about that.

That is why the Bloc Québécois made those proposals, based on the support of Quebeckers on October 14. It is completely unacceptable and a real shame that the government and the Prime Minister are ignoring those results. Under the circumstances, the Bloc Québécois has no choice but to vote against the Speech from the Throne.

• (1520)

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to rise today to reply to the Speech from the Throne, particularly after the speech by my colleague, the House Leader of the Bloc Québécois and member for Joliette.

We waited a long time for the throne speech that was presented yesterday, and that was supposed to kick-start our economy. The government had made a commitment to presenting us with active measures, new measures to assist the most vulnerable industries, the industries that in recent years have fallen victim to international competition. We were expecting concrete measures for two industries in particular. I am thinking of the forestry industry and the manufacturing industry, among others.

We have to remember that the manufacturing industry forms the economic base of Quebec, while the economic base of the west is the oil industry. Unfortunately, Canada and the Conservative government have failed in this presentation, which could have provided some oxygen not only for the manufacturing industry, but for the jobs associated with it as well. Today, we have a throne speech that is devoid of any measures, devoid of vision, and that once again ignores the economic base of Quebec, the manufacturing industry.

It is disappointing that in an economic slowdown the government did not do more to present a new vision for a new Canadian economy, an economy focused on the future, an economy that would have made a real green shift possible.

I heard the Minister of the Environment tell us—and we also believe this, on this side of the House—that the environment and the economy are closely linked. It has to be said that this is not the spirit of the throne speech presented to us yesterday. It is as if the government had forgotten that there was a food crisis in 2008. It is as if the government had forgotten that there was a climate change crisis. It is as if the government had forgotten that there is a financial crisis right now.

What should the government have done? First, listen to the appeal made by the United Nations on October 22, when it called on the industrialized nations to commit to a Green New Deal. Do something to make use of the opportunities that are unfortunately created by the economic slowdown, to commit Canada and the industrialized nations to embarking on a transition in their economies. Take action, as the United Nations says, to create an initiative to encourage investment in clean technology and natural resources, to restart the economy. The purpose of that United Nations initiative is to build a green economy, generate green jobs and establish market policies and instruments that are able to accelerate a transition to a sustainable economy.

The fact is that a few days after the G-20 summit, the government did not heed the UN call. It continued to put in place measures which, once again, will benefit the oil industry in Canada. This is no joke. The oil industry will receive \$2.8 billion in tax assistance over the next three years and the government will probably be handing out crumbs to the environmental sectors and industries that generate employment and could reposition our economy so that it is more competitive in coming years.

Thus, the government has failed to present a vision allowing Quebec and Canada to compete on foreign markets. What could the government have done? First, it could have taken its cue from the Bloc Québécois' election platform, which proposed a certain number of measures but not a shopping list.

The Address

• (1525)

There is a common thread underlying the measures presented by the Bloc Québécois. The goal is to ensure that we, particularly in Quebec, have a more sustainable economy. I will give a few examples. Fixed greenhouse gas reduction targets must quickly be set, and not intensity targets as proposed by the current federal government. Absolute targets are needed in order to establish a carbon exchange. That is what the new American president is proposing to us, and unfortunately, by refusing, it is Canada that risks undermining the viability of a future carbon exchange.

This is an important issue for our businesses in Quebec, since our manufacturing industry has reduced its greenhouse gas emissions by 8% compared to 1990. How? By making changes to industrial processes, by focusing on energy efficiency, by having plans that allow our businesses to reach their greenhouse gas reduction targets, and by being more productive compared to new, emerging economies.

Second, as I mentioned earlier, tax incentives given to the oil and gas industry must be eliminated in order to allow a fiscal conversion towards what is known as environmental taxation. Instead of the polluter-paid approach, we must take a polluter-pay approach. It is time to reinvest in renewable energy sources and move away from an industry that, in any case, is making huge profits.

Third, refundable tax credits for research and development must be established so that businesses can develop environmentally sound technologies. That is how the Quebec manufacturing industry was and is able to meet its greenhouse gas reduction targets, because it found ways to change its industrial processes. Investing in clean technology has been profitable for Quebec and allows it to honour its international commitments.

Furthermore, we must introduce tax incentives to encourage people to convert their heating systems, from oil-fueled heating to other technologies. One such example is geothermal, a very promising technology that could benefit from a tax incentive from the federal government.

We could make use of a number of industries to build this greener economy. Investment in modernizing and repairing our railways would be good for the economy and the environment, and it would enable the creation of sustainable intermodal transport in Quebec. We must also restore our small wharves in the regions of Quebec, from Sept-Îles to Montreal, to encourage maritime transportation, which pollutes less and allows us to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions in comparison with truck transportation. That is sustainable intermodal transport. The federal government has financial responsibilities that it must assume.

It is important that we reduce our dependency on oil. Why? For one thing, Quebec's results in reducing greenhouse gas emissions are inevitably linked to the transportation sector, where we must make considerable effort to meet our goals. Perhaps it is time to help citizens who want to use public transit by giving them a reimbursable credit, thereby encouraging people to use public transit. Or perhaps it is time to reinstate the ecoAuto program, which allowed people who wanted to buy a hybrid vehicle or one that uses

less than 6 litres per 100 kilometres to get a rebate. That is another measure that would encourage a greener economy.

Our automobile manufacturing standards should be changed, adapted and harmonized with those in the state of California and elsewhere. Our market in Canada is comparable to that of California. If it could work there, and if formerly innovative ideas have become practically the international standard, how can we explain that Canada is still dragging its feet when it comes to implementing tough regulations to remove the gas guzzlers from our market?

• (1530)

The government had a golden opportunity to present a plan, a vision for the future, in order to start our economy's transition towards a more traditional, greener economy. Unfortunately, the Conservative government has failed.

• (1535)

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ) Mr. Speaker, as is proper, I will begin my speech by thanking the voters of my riding for again showing confidence in me and electing me a second time. My congratulations also to all colleagues here on their election. And to you, Mr. Speaker, on your re-election in this House.

This Speech from the Throne does not meet the expectations of Quebeckers, the consensus of Quebeckers supported by all the parties in the National Assembly and Quebec's civil society as a whole.

There is a long list of ways in which the needs expressed in the Quebec consensus have not been met. Cuts to culture have not been restored. They still want to impose the Young Offenders Act. They still want to create a federal securities commission against the advice of those in the financial field in Quebec. There is no reference whatsoever to the Kyoto protocol in this Speech from the Throne. They continue in their desire to weaken the political power of Quebec in this House. Intrusions into Quebec's areas of jurisdiction go on and on. There is not a word about the fiscal imbalance, when no one in Quebec feels that it has been resolved. They still want to invest our tax dollars in nuclear energy and more military purchasing. And finally, of course, there is a total absence of any desire to restrict, or rather to do away with, the so-called federal spending power. All of this shows us that this government, despite its claim of openness to Quebec, is refusing to get onside with the consensus in Quebec.

We used to have a Liberal government that did not even claim to be open to Quebec, and did nothing to help Quebec.

This is what I would like to ask my colleague. What choice remains for Quebeckers in the medium term? What option remains so that we can truly move ahead with the strong consensus expressed in Quebec and not to be obliged to beg from Ottawa any longer?

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, my friend has answered his own question. I have been a member of this House for 12 years, and the leader of the Bloc Québécois has been here since 1990. Quebeckers tried to believe in what all the federal parties in this House had to offer. Under the Liberals and the Conservatives, we tried to believe in the wonderful opportunities that were laid out for us. But the fact is that Quebeckers have to vote based on their interests and what they believe in and aspire to.

The Address

I believe that, since 1990, the choice has been clear. There is only one sustainable choice for Quebec, and that is the Bloc Québécois. Quebec proved that in the most recent federal election. On October 14, Quebecers elected a majority—a strong majority—of Bloc Québécois members, despite what our colleagues opposite believed would happen a few months ago.

[*English*]

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to first thank the voters of Yukon for entrusting me with this great honour to represent them in Parliament for the fourth time. They are very fair people and I really appreciate their support.

I would like to congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, and of course all returning members and especially the new members. It is a great honour to be here and I know they will all appreciate it and treat it with that great honour.

I would like to question the member along the following line. I know the member is very interested in the environment. The throne speech states:

We will work with the provincial governments and our partners to develop and implement a North America-wide cap and trade system for greenhouse gases and an effective international protocol for the post-2012 period.

First of all, it says provinces and of course we do not like the exclusion of territories whether it is just the words or not. Definitely, the people of Yukon want to be involved in the environment and dealing with this critical problem that affects the north worse than anywhere else.

My question for the member is this. Does he take comfort in this? The Conservative Party as we know originally denied that climate change existed and then proceeded in government not to take any significant steps. Does this give the member comfort that the Conservative members have now come around and are taking this major step that all the other parties were asking for or does the member believe they have no choice and they have to do it because the United States is doing it and they are being pulled along by circumstances?

• (1540)

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie for a brief answer, please.

Mr. Bernard Bigras: Mr. Speaker, we do not have confidence in this government. My friend quotes page 13, but what is more alarming is that, on page 12, the government says, “Our Government will continue its realistic, responsible approach to addressing the challenge of climate change.”

The reality is just the opposite. The government says in this throne speech that it will continue its approach, which is not to take climate change into account in government policies. We expect the government to be environmentally responsible when it comes to the three Ps: policies, plans and programs. To date, this government has deeply disappointed us.

[*English*]

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my

constituents of Chatham-Kent—Essex for giving me the honour once more to represent them in the House of Commons.

I would also like to thank all of the volunteers who gave their time and energy during the election to make this happen.

Finally, I would also like to thank my wife Faye and my children: Jeremy and his wife Joeline; Rachael and her husband Justin; Michael and his wife Angela; David and his wife Katie; Joel; Andrea and her husband John; Adam and his wife Melany; and Eric and his wife Katie. Without their support I think it is quite obvious that this would have been a much different task.

Yesterday, we were graced by Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, the Governor General of Canada, who opened the 40th Parliament and laid out for Canadians the government's plan and agenda for the upcoming Parliament.

We have all just returned from our grueling campaign trails and so I take this time also to congratulate all of those returning and those newly elected to this House. The election race gave us the opportunity to face our constituents, the ones who have placed us here. The time also gave us the chance to listen to them very closely. After all, this is why we are here, to represent them in Ottawa.

I would like to tell the House a bit about my riding of Chatham-Kent—Essex. It is situated at the southern most part of this great country in southwestern Ontario. It is an area that has been blessed with some of the greatest agricultural land in all of Canada. It is a cornucopia of agriculture. It lies within the shadow of Detroit and the headquarters of the Detroit three, and has many satellite factories supplying parts for our all important auto industry.

The largest community, Chatham, has produced trucks at the Navistar plant for many years and has earned a proud tradition of workmanship that goes back three or four generations of craftsmanship.

Much of my riding lies along the shore of Lake Erie where, for instance, the town of Wheatley boasts the largest freshwater fishing port in the world.

At the base of the furthest land bridge of southern Canada, Point Pelee, lies the booming Municipality of Leamington, the tomato capital of Canada, where we will find the largest collection of farms under glass, namely greenhouses, in North America.

My colleagues can see that I am quite proud of my riding and like most insist it is the greatest riding in all of Canada. That is why I am so happy to reply to the Speech from the Throne today.

As I stated earlier, we have all had an opportunity to engage in a level of dialogue with our constituents that is normally impossible during an election.

I am happy to hear what our government plans to do and has done in the past two and a half years to address what the people of Chatham-Kent—Essex have told me.

First, my constituents wanted a government that would manage the global uncertainties that the storm clouds of economic chaos threaten to bring. I will be glad to bring back to them the report from the throne speech, a report that sets out a five prong plan.

The Address

The plan would reform the global financial system by working with our allies and trading partners to re-examine and renew the rules that underpin the global financial system.

Second, the plan would ensure sound budgeting by ensuring that Canada does not return to ongoing, unsustainable structural deficits while putting all federal expenditures under the microscope of responsible spending.

Third, our government's plan would secure jobs for families and communities by encouraging the skilled trades and apprenticeships, supporting workers facing transition, and providing further support to the automotive and aerospace industries.

Fourth, it would expand investment and trade by modernizing investment, competition and copyright laws while working with the United States to address shared challenges and pursuing trade agreements in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

Finally, the plan would make government more effective by reducing red tape, fixing procurement, improving program and service delivery, and improving the management of federal agencies, boards, commissions and crown corporations.

In addition to detailing the core economic priorities of the government, the Speech from the Throne also outlined other areas where our Conservative government will be looking to deliver results for Canadians.

• (1545)

We would secure our energy future by developing our rich energy resources and pursuing new, cleaner energy supplies, including further development of the natural gas resources in Canada's north. The government would also ensure it is ready to regulate new nuclear projects.

We would tackle climate change and preserve Canada's environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions 20% by 2020, ensuring that 90% of our electricity needs are met by non-emitting sources by the same deadline and banning bulk water exports.

We would help all Canadians participate by further improving the universal child care benefit, increasing access to maternity and parental benefits under employment insurance, and acting to help Canadians who care for loved ones with disabilities.

We would keep Canadians safe by strengthening the sentences for serious criminal offences, putting in place new rules for food and product safety, and introducing a new national security statement.

We would contribute to global security by ensuring that our foreign policy is based on Canadian values, rebuilding the Canadian Forces with the best possible equipment, and transforming the Canadian mission in Afghanistan to focus more on reconstruction and development.

We would build stronger institutions, including moving toward representation by population in the House of Commons for British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, introducing fixed terms for senators, allowing for senate nominees to be selected by voters, and enshrining the government's respect for provincial and territorial jurisdiction in a charter of open federalism.

This is precisely the kind of news my constituents would be very glad to hear.

For example, in that little town of Wheatley with the fishing port, there is a shipbuilder, Hike Metal, which has built some pretty amazing ships, such as research vessels, police patrols, hydrofoils, and auto ferries. The owner spoke to me about the recent government procurement to build RCMP rescue boats. He showed me the stack of paper, a long and complicated application, that would just qualify his company and told me that it was his responsibility to do the architectural drawings at his cost. He submitted the documents, only to find them non-compliant and was asked to resubmit. This was not the first time, nor is he the only shipbuilder being frustrated by our procurement system. In fact, he has told me he is ready to stop bidding on government jobs, and that would be a shame since he has proved he has the capability and the experience to build many of these ships, and in so doing has provided important jobs in the process.

I will be very glad to go to him and tell him about the government's commitment to make government more effective by reducing red tape and fixing the procurement system.

I will be going to the greenhouse growers of Leamington and assuring them that the commitment to the border crossing at Windsor, which is so essential to cross-border trade, is still in place.

Do members know that there are 20 million people who live within a 24-hour delivery area of Leamington's circle? The people of Leamington realized this and built a billion-dollar industry around the fact. However, produce with a limited shelf life cannot be held up at the border. That is why I know these greenhouse growers will be glad to hear that our commitment to the border crossing is still in place.

Furthermore, they will be glad to hear about our government's commitment to strengthen existing trade agreements, as well as expanding into new agreements.

I know that they were very happy to see us act early in the fall of 2007 and introduce the stimulus package that kept their industry competitive when they struggled with the combined force of a high dollar and high energy costs. They will be glad to hear we will stay the course because if we give Canadians an equal footing, I know we can compete with any market.

I know that many people working in our factories that supply Detroit automakers will be happy to hear our industry minister has gone to Washington to take part in the discussions with the automakers on ways to save our North American auto industry.

The Address

They will also be glad to see our government's commitment in the Speech from the Throne to do its part. This will be done by encouraging skilled trades and apprenticeships, and providing further support to the automotive and aerospace industries by methods like the automotive innovation fund. That fund helped save the Essex Ford engine assembly plant after Ford retooled and showed a plan to develop new diesel engines and the development of a new generation of gas engines.

● (1550)

I know that seniors with savings will be glad to hear that our banking system has been rated the best in the world. This is the result of economic banking rules and pre-emptive moves last year that shielded our banking system from the disastrous policies that have caused so many banks in the United States and around the world to fail.

Young families will be glad to hear that the government will further improve the universal child care benefit of which so many of them have expressed their appreciation during the election.

Those seniors and families will also be glad to hear that the government is committed to keeping them safe by strengthening the sentences for serious criminal offences and putting in place new rules for food and product safety, and introducing a new national security statement.

At this time of extraordinary global economic challenge and uncertainty, I know my constituents will be very glad with the course our government has laid out in the throne speech. They indicated to me that they expected our government to manage our country through this challenge in a responsible and prudent fashion. This is what we will deliver.

The last election returned our government with an added mandate, increasing our numbers, and thereby renewing confidence in the government.

Our government is committed to provide Canadians with the strong leadership that they expect from us. I believe that Canada will emerge from this challenge both stronger and more united. This will be accomplished by the prudent, responsible actions set out by the government.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when we look at the history, it was 1993 when the incoming Liberal government inherited a \$42 billion deficit scenario from the prior Mulroney government which meant that very serious steps had to be taken to deal with a deficit situation. Now we are facing a situation where the government still has not really admitted the facts. Yet, the budget officer today has made it very clear that the government is now spending, in just three years, \$40 billion a year more than it was when it took office.

It is pretty clear that we do not have the manoeuvre room, the financial flexibility, to give the assurance to Canadians that we can protect them when the tsunami finally hits, because it has not hit yet. We have had the earthquake but the tsunami is coming.

I have to ask the member, first, how will we protect those in our society who are unable to protect themselves? At a time of financial crisis it is those who have no income who cannot prepare themselves

for this. Whatever they have is bare minimum already. What is the commitment of the government to take care of those people, to help those first, those who are most in need?

● (1555)

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his return to the House and thank him for his question.

I want to point out, and I pointed it out in my speech as well, that it was the prudent foresight that the government acted on in the fall of 2007 that put us in the position we are in today. It has been stated a number of times that our country has had the highest rating of any banking system in the world. As a result of that, I can again go back to seniors and tell them that their funds are safe in our banks and that our banking institutions are safe.

I believe that is the prudent method. That is the one that has enabled us to be the leading country in the world. As a result, we are in strong economic shape. We will not be fully inoculated against what is happening in this world, but we were the last to enter, and we believe that through good, sound management, we will be the first to re-enter again into a strong economy.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the member for Chatham-Kent—Essex back to the House. We have had a chance to chat a number of times and I enjoy his company.

However, I cannot understand his reference to shipbuilding in saying that he will support the throne speech. It defies imagination. On page nine of the English version of the throne speech it specifically states that the government will push forward with a trade agreement with the European Free Trade Association.

We know that the shipbuilding industry and shipyard workers have expressed broad concerns about the EFTA agreement concluded by the previous trade minister because it will gut or eliminate our shipbuilding industry in the same way that the former trade minister was able to destroy our softwood lumber industry with an ill thought out softwood lumber sellout. We have the EFTA agreement where Liechtenstein bamboozled the former trade minister and the results could well be the loss of every shipbuilding job in the country.

It makes no sense that the member, who is concerned about the shipbuilding industry, will support a throne speech that undermines that same shipbuilding industry and those good jobs that result. In my area, in the Lower Mainland of B.C., the word "emerson" is a verb and it is not a nice verb. To emerson the public is not considered a nice thing to do.

Has the member thoroughly read the throne speech and does he understand the implications of adopting a trade agreement that kills our shipbuilding industry?

The Address

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Mr. Speaker, I also welcome the member back. Yes, we have had some great chats and I am sure we will have many more. I would invite the member to see our beautiful riding and maybe we could explore and take a tour of that shipbuilding yard. I would like to show the member that that particular company has been very effective, not only in this country but in the United States. Most of the shipbuilding that it does is for clients in the United States. So it is very able to compete.

The company has told me repeatedly that its biggest problem is the procurement system. That system needs to go because it is stifling business. The next problem is the red tape.

I am sure the government can fix those problems so that the shipbuilding business will be there next year and the years to follow, as will the ones in St. Catharines and the ones on the east coast. We can compete with anyone but we cannot compete with red tape and systems that bog us down.

• (1600)

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all members of Parliament who congratulated me and sent gifts on the new addition to my family, our first child, Aurora Sage Bagnell-Craig, born on October 29 at 5:53 p.m. weighing 7.64 pounds.

I welcome the hon. member back. My question is not from the throne speech but it is a serious issue for some of my constituents. It is related to credit cards. Some businesses are irate that there is a move to increase the merchant fees, especially in these very difficult times. I have also been told that companies are increasing potentially the fees for individuals who miss payments. Once again, when everyone is struggling this is not very timely. I want to be assured by the member that his government will be taking action on this front.

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to welcome the member back and I congratulate him on the arrival of the newborn. I know he will spend many wonderful evenings changing that baby and that he will be of great help to his spouse.

We are really discussing the throne speech and I must confess that I did not see that issue in the throne speech. However, I would be willing to take that up with the member. We can talk about those issues and I am sure we can approach the necessary ministries together and talk about this.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

I would like to preface my remarks with my deepest appreciation to the people of Don Valley East for my re-election to the House. It is an honour and privilege to serve as their representative. I would also like to congratulate all the returning members and new members. It is definitely a privilege to be here.

If we were one of those unemployed Canadians who once worked in Canada's manufacturing or auto sectors or if we were a recent graduate searching for the first break in the job market, yesterday's Speech from the Throne offers very little in the way of substance or hope for the future. This is truly a shame.

The reason the speech contains nothing in the way of substantial assistance to Canadians is because the federal government is broke. In fact, this particular Speech from the Throne will go down in

history because it is the first one that actually forecasts a federal deficit in advance of next week's economic statement.

Canadians have a right to be angry. It was just a few weeks ago during the federal campaign that the Prime Minister swore that his Conservative government would never run a federal deficit. On October 7, 2008, the Prime Minister addressed the Canadian Club in Toronto and issued the following statement:

A Conservative Government will not be raising taxes. We will not cancel planned tax reductions for business. We will not be running a deficit. We will keep our spending within our means.

I guess the Prime Minister should have mentioned that the Conservative campaign promises come with a caveat because this one has already passed its expiry date. This is a promise that the Prime Minister made just six weeks ago.

Furthermore the Conservative campaign platform released just a week before election day stated the following:

Our plan's budgeting is based on the revenue projections in Budget 2008. These are the most up-to-date projections released by the Department of Finance....

If the Prime Minister had the benefit of the most up-to-date information, why is he suddenly changing his tune today or the day after the election was held? The official excuse that we have been hearing all around today from the government side is that there is a downturn in the global economy, but nothing could be further from the truth. This is a made in Canada federal deficit, courtesy of the Conservative Party.

Less than three years ago, the Conservatives inherited a \$13 billion federal surplus from the Liberals. Unemployment was at its historical lows and the Liberals had put in place contingency funds to cover unforeseen budget costs and to pay down the federal debt at the same time.

How did the Conservatives blow that \$13 billion surplus in such a short period of time? First, in spite of the advice of leading economists across Canada, the Conservatives went ahead with a bunch of tax gimmicks that did little to benefit Canadian taxpayers, yet created a massive hole in the public treasury to the tune of \$11 billion. These tax measures did not create jobs, spur consumer spending or boost productivity. Instead, they created a hole.

Second, the Minister of Finance went on the largest spending spree in Canadian history with his budget 2007. Now Canadians will have a tough time swallowing the Conservatives' apology in next week's economic statement. In fact, the Conservatives will be hard pressed to explain why the cupboard is bare with little or nothing to offer Canadians in advance of an economic recession.

Although the Prime Minister has a background in economics, he sadly lacks the basic fundamentals to run a fiscally sound government. The Liberals ran healthy federal surpluses so that we could pay down the federal debt and our children and grandchildren would not have to pick up the tab with interest added on.

• (1605)

Unfortunately, those fiscal fundamentals have gone out the window with the Conservatives.

The Address

The Governor of the Bank of Canada has already indicated that moderate growth forecasts for the Canadian economy have virtually evaporated in less than a month. In other words, Canadians cannot expect too much from the Conservatives in terms of tax cuts or economic assistance because the federal government is broke. Once again, it is a Conservative government that is quick to whip out the federal credit card and start running up the public debt at taxpayers' expense.

The Speech from the Throne says so in the following paragraph:

Ongoing, unsustainable deficits are quite rightly unacceptable to Canadians. These structural deficits must never return. At the same time, in a historic global downturn, it would be misguided to commit to a balanced budget in the short term at any cost, because that cost would ultimately be borne by Canadian families.

That statement is truly astounding. A deficit is essentially an unpaid bill for our children and our children's children to eventually pay off.

I would like to know how much of the federal debt the Conservatives plan to pay off in the upcoming budget. The answer would have to be nothing. Few Canadians are aware that the largest single federal expenditure is interest payments on the federal debt. In budget 2008, that represented \$33.9 billion or 14.5¢ of every tax dollar. We still owe \$500 billion in federal debt and now the Conservatives are pulling out the government's credit card and piling on more and more.

Philosopher George Santayana is often remembered for the following quote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". Unfortunately, this is true of the Conservative Party.

In 1993, the Liberals inherited a \$42 billion deficit from the Conservatives and were given the unpleasant task of cleaning up eight years of Tory mismanagement. The Liberals did a very fine job. They cleared off the deficit and brought Canada back as the strongest and most fiscally responsible country in the G-8.

Now we may need to clean up the Conservatives' mess because they are going down a slippery slope. As the official opposition, the Liberal Party pledges to make this minority Parliament work but we need to look after the interests of Canadians who will eventually demand a fiscally responsible government that is accountable, reliable and lives up to its campaign promises.

● (1610)

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her excellent speech. I know that coming from Toronto she has a deep interest in social issues and I want to ask her about an issue that is very pressing on the minds of many of our citizens, and that is the issue of access to child care.

The absence of child care is an enormous problem for families across our country. Today is the international day for the year of the child. One of the most effective programs that can be adopted for children which can prevent an array of social problems, from youth crime to keeping kids in school longer, is the ability for us to have access to a head start early learning program.

Does my colleague think the government should work with us in a bipartisan fashion to implement a national early learning daycare head start program for children so that the children of our country

can have the basic needs they must have in order to develop and be nurtured in a loving, caring environment?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, my friend is aware of the studies that were done by Dr. Fraser Mustard. Early learning and child care strategies are very critical because they help the country to be more productive. We need a country that is economically productive. If we were to be ideologically bound, as the Conservatives were in the past election by establishing a \$100 fend-for-yourself system, it will not work.

It is important for the government and the opposition parties to work toward a very cohesive strategy for early learning and child care because it will boost the economy and productivity. However, I do not know whether the government has any money because it has claimed on page 6 that it will only fund essential programs and nothing else. I wonder how the vulnerable will be looked after.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I extend congratulations to my colleague, the hon. member for Don Valley East, on her comments today and on her re-election.

It seems that the government is blaming our economic downturn on global factors and is suggesting it began in the U.S.

Would she care to comment on how those policies have affected us, and does she have a solution that is distinctly our own?

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, the problem with the U.S. economy was the subprime mortgages, the deregulated way in which the mortgages were given out in the U.S.

Thanks to Liberal governments in the past, we had a very structured, regulated system. Prime Ministers Martin and Chrétien tried to avoid the deregulation that was demanded by opposition parties at that time.

It is important to note that when the Liberal government was in power, it set aside \$3 billion in contingency funds. Those contingency funds were essential to help with various crises, such as 9/11, SARS, and the ice storm that affected Quebec and Ontario.

The Conservative government removed that contingency fund and it has nothing to fall back on. It is bad economics to let that contingency fund go. One cannot be so ideologically bound that contingency funds are let go and free markets rule. It could create a disaster. We will have to watch this very carefully.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the greatest honours any of us could have is to be chosen by our fellow citizens to represent them in this wonderful and august House. I would like to thank the constituents of my riding of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, the most beautiful riding in Canada, for enabling me to serve them for a sixth term and to be their voice here in Parliament to fight for their needs.

The Address

I also want to give a very big thank you to all of the volunteers. Clearly, with a win by 68 votes, this would not have been done without their hard work. This is a victory by them and for them and I thank them very much for this, especially my two campaign managers, Harry Kuiack and Lynne Henderson. They worked tirelessly, along with all of the volunteers on my team.

The Speech from the Throne was reasonable in its content but it lacked vision and specifics on the big issues of the day.

All of us here are citizens of our great country, but our citizenship implies a responsibility, a responsibility to ourselves, to our citizens and to our country. It also implies a responsibility on the part of the government of the day to our citizens, and as elected members we have a responsibility to our fellow countrymen and countrywomen.

A series of solutions should have been enshrined in the Speech from the Throne to deal with the most pressing and persistent issues that affect our citizens on the ground, and in that, the throne speech was lacking. I am going to outline some of the things the government should do. If the Prime Minister is truly being honest in his desire to work in a bipartisan fashion, then I know he will find across party lines the willingness to do this in the interests of the common good of our great country.

We have heard much about the economic challenges. This will entail a number of solutions. Timely, temporary and targeted fiscal stimuli may be necessary. The Bank of Canada rate is at about 2.25%, which is low. We could also use a number of integrated responses here. We could have an integrated parliamentary committee to deal with international trade, revenue and finance, to work together on the solutions that are required.

We could also bring together our best and brightest minds to put together the science and policy making, rooted in good research, which should drive the policies our country requires to deal with the challenges ahead. One of the heartbreaking things that I have noticed in this House over the last six terms is the inability to connect the best and brightest minds in our country with the challenges at hand. Too often the battle that goes on here has to do with trying to embarrass the other side, rather than trying to find the best solutions. Rather than a battle over ideas, people try to make the most egregious comments against each other.

There is something that is missing internationally. International tools are required to have a common securities regulator, for each country to have common objectives and common guidelines, in terms of how we deal with investments. The recapitalization of banks is critically important. It is essential that the countries of the world come together to ameliorate the contagion that is running through the financial markets in order to limit the damage but also to prevent this from happening in the future.

We saw a Ponzi scheme wreak havoc with the international financial markets, but most important, destroy the financial savings of citizens around the globe and cause the unemployment rates to increase. This is having a devastating effect on people's lives. At the end of the day, that is what it is all about.

The Speech from the Throne missed many other areas.

The number one sleeper issue that is not being dealt with is our aging population. Years ago people could expect to live to about 57 or 58 years. Now men can expect to live to the age of 79 and women can expect to live to the age of 82. There will be a huge impact upon our society, especially on the expenditures that will have to come out of government revenues. We have to deal with this by providing solutions now.

•(1615)

People could be encouraged to work longer if they were able to extract their CPP, perhaps tax free. We have to expand our workforce in a way that is responsible and give people the choice to continue working if they wish to. Today, 65 years of age is the new 40. I can say that at my age very easily.

Access to education is important. Education is key to ensuring that we have a productive economy. Shockingly, access to education in our country is dependent upon the amount of money one has in one's pocket. We live in a country where we should never have to say to those who are qualified and want to get a post-secondary education that they cannot because they do not have enough money in their pockets. In the last election the Liberal Party put forth a very comprehensive series of solutions to enable our citizens access to education without hurting financially as a result.

As I said before, we have to connect some of our excellent research groups, such as Genome B.C. and the Public Health Agency of Canada, which do phenomenal research, and innovative groups such as the MaRS Centre at the University of Toronto which links up research and the utilization of that research to market.

The big issue that was not dealt with in the election campaign, much to our chagrin and to the chagrin of the Canadian public, was health care. In Canada today it is a toss-up for those who get sick as to whether or not they will get timely access to quality health care. Why on earth are we wedded to a piece of paper? Why are we not wedded to the fundamental principle of enabling our citizens, when they get sick, access to timely, quality health care when they need it, without hurting financially as a result? That is what we should be fighting for.

The old shibboleth that we have a choice merely between the Canadian system and the American system is nonsense. What about the systems that exist in the European countries, in Germany, France, Norway, and Sweden? They have better outcomes and healthier populations at a lower cost. Why is that? We do not have to study this any more, but we need to work with the provinces, the managers of health care, to enable them to implement those solutions that will enable our citizens to get the care they need when they are most vulnerable.

We are all getting older, and so too is our medical workforce population. They are getting older. They are getting burnt out, and they are leaving the profession, which means there is a smaller number of medical professionals who are able to carry on the work. We put more pressure on them, and therefore, more of them burn out. There is a crisis in our medical workforce. We need a national medical workforce strategy. We need to work with the provinces and the professional faculties to deal with this crisis, not tomorrow, but now.

The Address

The public service has been maligned and ignored by the Conservative government. No longer can that continue. If the Prime Minister really wants to work in a bipartisan fashion, he needs to listen to MPs from all parties. No longer can it be a government run by the Prime Minister's office. A small number of people, largely unelected, cannot continue to make the decisions in our nation. The problems are too large and too complicated. There are many people with many good ideas who must be heard in order to work for the common good. The public service cannot have a situation where those of us in the opposition require somebody from a minister's office to listen in as a spy during meetings with them. That is absolutely ridiculous.

On the international aspect, the world needs more Canada. We are in a unique position to deal with the global challenges that face us. We are part of a global society. We must work in our own self-interest, but our self-interest is tied to the interests of our fellow citizens around the globe. As the saying goes, we only have one race, the human race. The Prime Minister said that he wants to double aid to Africa. Make no mistake, that aid should be for development and should be measured in outcomes. We should focus on the millennium development goals and not simply focus on a number but on the outcomes we are having in the international field. We are at the nadir with respect to our international diplomacy. We need to deal with that.

• (1620)

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I thank the constituents of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca. Together we can work for the common good and for all of us, that is our task at hand.

• (1625)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I congratulate the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca on his recent election victory. I know it is one of many in the past.

The member brought some commentary with regard to the health care system to the floor of the House of Commons. It seemed during the election campaign that we, as members of Parliament and as candidates for respective parties, were pressured not to comment on anything but the status quo when it came to the health care field.

The hon. member has brought to the floor some discussion with regard to alternatives to the current system, something that is different from the status quo in terms of possibly the delivery of health care.

He was a little vague in terms of what specifically he was proposing, so could the hon. member bring a bit more depth to his suggestion that things might be done differently within the health care system?

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member and all of our colleagues across party lines on being elected. It is a huge honour for all of us and I look forward to working with everybody. I want to congratulate everybody on their great victory in being able to represent their constituents.

There are a couple of things.

First, the national medical manpower strategy ought to be implemented by working with our provinces. The Minister of Health

should work with her colleagues across the country to implement a national workforce strategy.

Second, the head start program is the most effective way of preventing an array of social problems. It keeps kids at school longer, reduces youth crime by 60% and saves the taxpayer \$7 for every dollar invested.

By looking at the European models of mixed systems of public and private, and we already have that in our country, we can utilize the best of both worlds to strengthen our public system and enable us to have better outcomes at a lower cost.

As time passes, the amount of money that is being spent on health care is growing and consuming vast amounts of the public purse, so much so that health care is being rationed in our country and being withheld from the public in order to save money. That cannot continue. Who pays the price? The poor and the middle class. They are the most vulnerable in our society.

Last, on the issue of poverty, so many members of our society do not have enough money for their basic needs. We had an excellent solution in our green shift to shift some moneys to those who were least privileged in our society. The government should take that on as one of the most important tasks at hand.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was quite heartened by the potential for a democratic promotion agency. The member, who is probably the dean of the House in international aid, has been a great champion and has had great success with work in that area. I hope this will be a shift in direction.

It is great that Canadians have great diplomatic skills with all our great diaspora and experience in developing democracy around the world. We should put more emphasis in that direction and not just send in the troops. Maybe this in conjunction with the troops would be a great addition.

I was a bit concerned that I did not see any specific help in the throne speech for very troubled spots in the world. We have financial troubles, but there are people who are even worse off.

The member is very sensitive to the people of Darfur, the people of the Congo and the people of Tibet and, as chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Burma, the people of Burma. I am sure the member is on side that we need not forget these people. We should do everything we can to help them.

• (1630)

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Yukon for the fine work that he has done on Burma. The citizens of that country are some of the most desperate individuals as a result of their brutal and thuggish government. The member has tried very hard to get assets on the ground in times of emergency. I have enjoyed working with him to that effect.

The government has failed to show any kind of vision with respect to dealing with the international challenges ahead.

Our combination of defence, diplomacy and development of trade, three D's plus T, will deal with what I call the three C's that are affecting the developing world, conflict, corruption and the lack of capacity. These three issues should be the cornerstone of what we should address.

The Address

It is not the goal to have a certain amount of money. What is more important is how we spend that money. We should look at is the outcome for development. This means Canada should tap into the capacity we have here and use it to help other countries help themselves.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise in the House once again on behalf of the people of Crowfoot and to respond to the Speech from the Throne delivered in the Senate chamber yesterday.

This is also my first opportunity to speak in this 40th Parliament on behalf of the voters of Crowfoot. I want to spend a few moments to thank them for the support and the confidence that they placed in me in the last election. I pledge again today to work very hard on their behalf as their elected federal representative in the House of Commons. I am humbled and I want to thank them for their strong level of support.

I want to thank my campaign team, my campaign manager, my board, Steven Snider, Judy Wilson and Gail Nordstrom, three of the main ones in my campaign organization.

Most of all this afternoon, I would like to thank my wife and my family for their remarkable support, not only in the last campaign but throughout my tenure here in the fourth Parliament that I have had the privilege of serving.

I should also say a little personal note. Shortly after the election my wife broke her arm and is today sitting at home recuperating from two major surgeries on that arm. I wish her a speedy recovery as I sit way down here and she sits way back there.

In the last election the people of Crowfoot spoke with a very strong voice. Again, I am proud to be their spokesman in this place. It is an honour to represent people who are so firm in their convictions.

I would like to think that Albertans know a fair bit about what works and what does not work. We try to pay as we go. We also try to save for rainy days. Our communities, like many other communities across the country, pull together when the going gets tough to accomplish large tasks.

I hope in this 40th Parliament that we learn from the lessons of our municipal leaders and our provinces. With the different parties that are represented in Parliament, I hope we learn to pull together because over the next bit, as the global economic crisis increases, we will need all parties to work together where we can to help make our nation stronger.

My riding is predominantly a rural riding consisting of a few small cities, a number of large towns and many villages and smaller towns. I think everyone is now aware of the economic times ahead. Over the past summer, we faced some very difficult times. In fact, in the election campaign, when we began in September, the number one issue was the high cost of fuel.

People drive long distances in my rural riding. There is no mass transit. We drive to work. Our children are picked up by school buses and in some cases transported for close to an hour to get to school. With the high price of gasoline and diesel fuel this past summer, we had a preview of some of the hard and difficult times that our

country would perhaps go through, although the economy in Alberta remains fairly stable.

The agricultural sector in my constituency was hit hard as well. Input costs were high. The price of diesel was felt when the tractors were fuelled up in the spring and the combines in the fall. We have high input costs already and this was an added blow to the agricultural sector. People in Crowfoot remain confident and optimistic.

Basically, the constituency is made up of predominantly fiscal Conservatives. We understand that when the going gets tough, we have to batten down the hatches and face what is coming. We do what is necessary to get the job done. We work together.

When I think back over my 10 years in Parliament, I think about different analogies of working together.

• (1635)

In 2002 Alberta faced the largest drought that our country has ever seen. In my agricultural and mainly gas and oil riding the farmers were devastated. We had no feed for our livestock. Members will recall that eastern farmers responded. Farmers from Ontario, Quebec and Nova Scotia sent 60,000 large hay bales out to Alberta in what we called the Hay West Campaign. I had the privilege of serving as one of the ones who helped distribute that hay in Alberta. We got the animals fed. That is how Canada works. We had come together. We put aside party lines and we ask how we can help when there is a need. We help each other.

The Speech from the Throne states on page 3:

Canada was founded on the belief that, by joining our strength in confederation, our united country would be able to meet and rise above any challenge set before us.

Canadians on October 14, and also in 2006, elected a Prime Minister and a government that were prepared to lead our country through this global economic crisis. There is a plan for our country to survive the coming hard times and emerge as an even stronger nation when things turn around and become more stable in the global economy. Part of the plan was given to us yesterday in the Speech from the Throne.

All countries in the world already recognize that the economic fundamentals have served us here in Canada very well. Many nations wish they would have adopted similar banking systems and regulations that Canada has had the privilege and the pleasure of living under for many years.

These nations also know that since 2006, the Conservative government has paid down close to \$40 billion on the accumulated national debt. In the previous Parliament, our government dramatically reduced taxes for businesses, families and individuals. Our government's prudent economic track record is the reason Canadians re-elected us to govern on October 14. Canadian voters entrusted our government with a renewed and a strengthened mandate. Now they are saying that they expect this Parliament to work.

The Address

At the same time, the time of extraordinary global challenge, our Prime Minister and my colleagues are mindful of the privilege and the responsibility that we have to govern and that has been entrusted to us. Therefore, in the Speech from the Throne we pledged that we would devote our energy to addressing the challenges that families and businesses faced. Our government is committed to ensuring Canada's continued economic success even in spite of the global economic instability.

The Speech from the Throne lays out the government's plan to protect the economy and the security of Canadians by doing a number of things. I will list five of them here: first, reforming global finance; second, ensuring sound budgeting; third, securing jobs for families and communities; fourth, expanding investment and trade; and, fifth, making government more effective.

What will this plan do? In order to reform the global finance networks, Canada has agreed to work with its allies and trading partners to re-examine and renew the rules that underpin the global financial system. Our Prime Minister already has assured leaders from other allied countries and other counterparts in the international community that we will work together and that we will help them in the current crisis.

We will ensure our federal government sticks to sound budgeting so Canada does not return to ongoing, unsustainable structural deficits. We will be putting all federal expenditures under the microscope of responsible spending. This is what small families, individuals and businesses expect. That is what they are doing right now as they recognize also the difficult times that they will be facing in their business, the same type of re-evaluation at which many businesses are looking.

● (1640)

The Prime Minister's plans outlined in the throne speech will also secure jobs for families and communities by encouraging the skilled trades and apprenticeships, and supporting workers facing transition.

The Prime Minister gave us an appetizer as to what we may be doing with apprenticeship programs, but I think it is important that we understand that the key to a strong economy in these difficult times is to continue to educate our workforce, to continue to ensure it is trained, and that it is ready to face the onslaught that is coming.

We also stated that we will expand our investment and we will expand our trade with the United States. We want to work on addressing the shared challenges that we have with our largest trading partner and our closest neighbour. We want to also encourage new trade agreements with European countries, Asia and the Americas. I am very pleased to see that the Minister of State for the Americas recognizes the importance of continuing this, together with our trade minister.

Finally, we want to make government more effective by reducing red tape, fixing procurement, improving program and service delivery, and improving the management of federal agencies, boards, commissions and crown corporations.

The Speech from the Throne states:

Hard decisions will be needed to keep federal spending under control and focused on results. Grants, contributions and capital expenditures will be placed

under the microscope of responsible spending. Departments will have the funding they need to deliver essential programs and services, and no more.

As Canadians begin to tighten their belts, watch their wallets closely, streamline business and cut out inefficiencies, our federal government will be doing the same thing. Given today's economic uncertainty, it is more important than ever that our government keeps our sights fixed on responsible fiscal management.

The throne speech also sets out our government's plan to build on the work that we did in the previous Parliament. We are making a difference in the lives of Canadians. Besides recognizing this economic global unrest, besides recognizing what came out of the United States and that has affected the entire world, this government has recognized that people and families are still the main reason that we work here in this place.

Besides working to face this crisis, our government wants to secure our energy future, tackle climate change and preserve Canada's environment, expand opportunities for Canadians and also keep Canadians safe. We highlighted contributing to global security and building stronger institutions.

I want to talk not so much specifically in great detail but just a bit on each one of those.

In terms of reducing our energy future, we want to develop our rich energy resources and pursue new, cleaner energy supplies. This includes further development of natural gas resources in Canada's north. Although we have talked about many different aspects of Canada's north, the importance of our sovereignty, the importance of using it or losing it, the natural gas and the resources that are in the north will definitely be a huge part in our coming out of this downturn and securing our future.

We will tackle climate change and preserve Canada's environment by continuing what we brought forward in the last Parliament, by reducing our gas emissions 20% by the year 2020. We will ensure that 90% of our electricity needs are met by non-emitting sources by 2020.

● (1645)

My constituency office still receives letters about the sale of Canada's fresh water. I think it was the Prime Minister again today who very clearly said that we will ban bulk water exports. We will protect Canada's fresh water and our environment. To underscore that, this is part of the plan in the throne speech.

We plan to further improve the universal child care benefit, increase access to maternity and parental benefits under employment insurance, and take action to help Canadians who care for loved ones with disabilities. Those who were in the previous Parliament know that these were all issues that were brought forward and we continue to work toward.

The Address

In terms of the security of our country, we pledge to keep Canadians safe by strengthening the sentences for serious criminal offences. Canadians need to be assured that they are safe in their homes and in their communities. We want to strengthen our criminal justice system in key areas, such as youth crime, organized crime and gang violence. We need to continue to focus gun laws on ending smuggling and stronger penalties for gun crimes.

The throne speech says that our government does not support criminalizing law-abiding firearm owners. This again remains one of the most responded to issues in my constituency, the long gun registry. I was very pleased when I heard the Governor General mention this while reading the throne speech and our commitment to ending the long gun registry.

We will continue to contribute to global security by ensuring that our foreign policy is based on Canadian values. We will continue to rebuild Canadian Forces with the best possible equipment.

Again, we find that Canada is involved in Afghanistan, that Canada is taking a leading role in the most difficult part of Afghanistan, the Kandahar region, and we will again commit to being certain that the mission moves toward reconstruction and development as time goes on. We continue to help train the Afghan military, work with the Afghan police, and build institutions in Afghanistan. But the mission in Afghanistan continues to change.

Finally, we will not only improve the institutions in countries and nations far away but the institutions in our country. This includes moving toward representation by population in the House of Commons and in those provinces that are seeing a large growth in population, specifically British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario.

We also want to introduce fixed terms for our senators, allowing Senate nominees to be selected by voters. I should mention that Senator Bert Brown from my constituency sits in the other place down the hall and he is there because the people of Alberta elected him to that position.

In my riding the Speech from the Throne is good news on a number of fronts. We responded to many of the concerns that are facing our agricultural sector. We understand the difficulty that the beef industry is facing at the present time. In fact, while I was in Ottawa, my wife rounded up the cattle and sold our calf crop that I thought I would sell in January. I understand the difficulties that the agricultural sector is facing.

What was also mentioned in the Speech from the Throne was the fact that western Canadian farmers have asked the government to move toward a place where they could have more choice in how they market their grain. Again, we are committed to ensuring freedom of choice for grain marketing in western Canada and I look forward to moving toward that.

• (1650)

I encourage all members to sit back and take a look at the times we face. Where can we work together? There is a global economic crisis and Canada is very well positioned to come through it with far less pain than many other countries around the world. We have the opportunity to emerge from this crisis stronger than before, and I hope that this Parliament will take the opportunity to build on that so

that Canada will continue to be strong and that Canada will continue to prosper.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, like all of the previous speakers, I want to congratulate all of the new members and all of the members who have returned to the House following the election.

I listened carefully to my colleague's remarks. It is interesting to hear how much he wants to see change happen and wants things to be done to help the economy recover. However, I wonder if my colleague can explain why and how. When we were called back to the House in a hurry less than a month after the elections, we were glad. We believed that the voters would get their money's worth, that the government would take charge of the economy, that it would make sure things were working, and that it would bring in specific measures to ensure that people did not suffer because of economic ups and downs.

However, this week, the Minister of Finance told reporters that he did not intend to implement any measures, introduce any new programs, or spend any new money before the next budget, to be introduced in February or April. It looks as though the desire to act has little in common with reality. Can the member tell us why?

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, we have laid out very clearly that our government will play a role in dealing with this economic downturn.

I recall our Prime Minister saying over a year ago that we would be facing economic difficulties in the future, that there was going to be a crisis facing the world, and that we needed to position ourselves well and early. I was one who, when the GST cuts came, initially did not understand the importance this would have to our economy, but as I went out into our constituencies, I kept hearing people say that it meant great savings for them so they could purchase things or do things.

What our government tried to do early was to lower the tax level for individual Canadians and for business. We tried to put in place strong fiscal measures so that Canada would be well positioned. What else did we do? We cut taxes. We cut the amount of revenue coming into our government, but we said that with the surplus we have, we would not go out at the end of the fiscal year and start to spend, spend, spend. We would pay down our national debt and that has positioned us very well.

When investors from around the world take a look at what Canada has done in paying down debt, they see a commitment and they have more confidence in our economy. They see an economy that is based not only on energy but on people, and so again, there is more of a confidence there now.

The member is asking what we are going to do. I am saying that the departments are going to take a look and see where we can streamline. Our departments are going to evaluate whether Canadians are getting value for these programs, and if they are not getting value for programs, these programs will be diminished.

The Address

That is why members have heard our Prime Minister and different ministers inviting the opposition to come together and ask how we can streamline some of the programs that exist at the present time that are not delivering value. I hope that different opposition leaders and different parties come and say, “These are some of the areas where we can streamline”.

We can also say that we will respond. We have responded to programs that deal with families, that deal with single parents. We have responded in many different ways. We are going to continue to keep a strong social fabric here in Canada that we have come to appreciate and expect.

• (1655)

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, like others, I want to congratulate the member for Crowbush on his election to the House of Commons. As he wins by large majorities he obviously is held in high esteem by the constituents of that riding.

In earlier comments, the member mentioned that he comes from a part of the country that knows what works and what does not. When we came back to Parliament this week we were faced with a very severe situation of an economic downturn, not only worldwide but in this country. We get reports every day that this country is either now in or is heading into deficit.

During the election the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance spoke to reporters and Canadians and told them that was not possible. In fact, the Prime Minister said that all we were going through was a buying opportunity in the stock market.

I will not blame everything on the Prime Minister. The problem started in the United States with an ideology of capitalism, lesser and lesser governments, lower and lower taxes, especially for the rich, and the deregulation of all industries, whether it be the mortgage, the banking or the food safety industries. This did not work for Reagan and it did not work for George W. Bush. Although we are only in the first couple of years of this mandate, I am not sure it will work in this country.

The member across said that he knows what works and what does not work. Does he have any concern that the ideology with which this country is now governed might not work?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I would just correct the hon. member. It is not Crowbush. It is Crowfoot.

The member across asked whether this will work. I have a lot of confidence in the Prime Minister. I have confidence in the fact that we ran in the last election on leadership. Canadians looked at the leadership of different parties and they said that they wanted the leadership in the Conservative Party at this time.

As I stated in my speech, going into the election we were concerned about high gas prices and different things, but as the campaign went on we realized we were into a downturn that my generation has never seen before. Am I confident that it will work? I am confident that when good men and women from different sectors and different political parties decide to work together, great things can happen. That is what we are inviting the opposition to do. We are inviting the opposition to recognize the difficulties around the world and how they will affect our country, our businesses, our people, the

wealthy, the middle class and the poor, and then commit to working together.

The member spoke about capitalism and whether capitalism works. I spoke to a radio station in Stettler, Alberta, Q14. The lady interviewing me said that everyone was a capitalist on the way up and a socialist on the way down. I am finding in this place that on the other side there are more socialists on the way up and down.

I am suggesting that we all must realize that economies around the world are moving downward. We need to be aware of the social problems. We need to be aware of problems facing investors, small towns and cities, and the difficulties facing all sectors in this downturn. It is time we worked together to put in place strong economic fundamentals.

We have a strong banking system in this country. I will not get into a debate about who put them in place but I am glad they are there. Our banks remain strong. The fiscal capacity of our government remains strong. I am proud of that and we are very fortunate that we can say we still have a strong fiscal capacity. We have paid down debts and have lowered taxes in the past. Our pensions remain strong.

We want to make certain that provinces continue to receive the dollars they need for social, health care and all the other issues that are their responsibilities. We want to make certain that families have more disposable income. I am not one who sits back and simply waits for a government to respond and ask what it will do for me. Now is the time to give Canadians the opportunity to keep money in their pocket and to do much more for themselves. Our government will be here where we need to be.

• (1700)

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your re-election to the chair. I am sure you will do what you can to maintain a dignified level of debate in this Parliament. I will also strive to live up to the expectations of the people of my riding, Sudbury and all Canadians, as they expect this from the House.

I would also like to join with my fellow New Democrats in offering up my congratulations to the Prime Minister and to the leader of the official opposition.

[*Translation*]

I am also offering them to the leader of the Bloc Québécois.

[*English*]

I also want to recognize my fellow new MPs who are taking up their duties for the first time. I am honoured to have been elected alongside them and I look forward to working with them on behalf of Canadians.

I also want to thank the people of Canada for electing the second largest New Democrat caucus in our history.

The Address

I would be remiss if I did not thank my family. I want to thank my wife, Yolanda, my two young daughters, Trinity and Thea, my parents, Eddie and Georgie, along with my large extended family for their faith and never wavering support.

Most of all, I would like to give a big thanks to the people of Sudbury for allowing me to represent them to the rest of the country. I understand the enormous responsibility with which this role comes and I am humbled that they believe in me to carry it out on your behalf. I will not let them down.

It is in the spirit of responsibility, however, that I must join with my fellow New Democrats in opposing the Speech from the Throne. The Canadian economy is facing an unprecedented downturn. Millions of Canadian families are worried about their jobs, their pensions and their savings. They are counting on the federal government to take bold and strategic steps.

The words in yesterday's throne speech do not match the urgency or the depth of what is required to protect working families in this economy. Canadians were hoping for more. New Democrats were expecting more.

In Sudbury, we are already seeing signs of the slowing economy. Six months ago, as commodity prices were riding high on the exchange markets and economies around the world were expanding, so was Sudbury. Not only were Vale Inco and Xstrata hiring massive numbers of new miners and other workers, but new junior companies were staking claims and planning new mines.

Sudbury had not seen this level of expansion in decades. Some predicted that this boom would last another decade or so. With the price of nickel and other metals plunging, so has expansion. Planned new mines are being mothballed and the first of the layoffs have already started. Families that were once so hopeful for what this future could bring are now worried about what this global crisis will bring.

Sudbury has endured recessions before and knows the costs to a community. In talking to people in my riding, they see nothing in yesterday's throne speech that will help them or their community in this downturn.

I had the opportunity to speak to an elderly widowed woman in Sudbury just last week. The conversation was difficult as she explained to me that she had just recently lost her husband and that she was alone trying to pay the taxes on her home, put food on the table and pay the bills, all the while her savings and her pensions are vanishing in this economic downturn.

She is not alone. She is one of literally thousands of seniors in my riding of Sudbury and millions of seniors who built our great country who were virtually ignored in the throne speech.

Organizations like the Older Adult Centres Association and our local YMCA continue to offer programs to help seniors through difficult times, so too should this government.

I commend the work of the many organizations in Sudbury working hard for our seniors and one day I hope to commend the government on the work that it should be doing on behalf of our seniors.

That is why I decided to run for office. People like the elderly woman in Sudbury need more, not more of the same. We need bold action and a fresh direction. We need to start putting families first rather than big corporations. In all the talk of restraint there was no mention of suspending the \$7.3 billion in corporate tax breaks set to kick in in 2009.

We were elected just as this economic turmoil began. The people who voted for us, no matter what party we belong to, voted for real action to help alleviate the impacts of this global crisis. Sadly, most of what I heard in yesterday's throne speech was a steady as it goes approach with little direction to actually deal with problems facing Canadian families.

Besides the lack of real action and a real action plan for dealing with the economy, there were a number of gaping holes that should not have been ignored.

● (1705)

There was little mention of how the government will deal with the growing doctor deficit. Five million Canadians still do not have access to a family doctor. Family doctors are the front door into our medical system. Without an adequate amount it starts to fall apart and other areas, such as emergency departments, must take up the slack. It also has an adverse effect on people's health as they wait longer to see a doctor and medical problems end up getting worse.

There was no mention of trying to stop outrageous fees being charged on credit cards, bank accounts and cellphones. This price gouging has been going on far too long as the government has turned a blind eye to these predatory tactics. By capping and scrapping these hidden and outrageous fees, the government would actually be making life a little easier in these uncertain times.

Child care is virtually ignored in the throne speech. Families across Canada have been demanding a truly national system of child care. I just received an email from a mother in Sudbury who has been waiting over a year and a half for a day care spot. This is forcing her to choose child care options with which she is not entirely comfortable. This is a horrible situation for any parent to go through. The throne speech does little to help parents dealing with the lack of affordable child care spaces across my riding and across the country.

However, despite my objection over the majority of the content of the throne speech, there were some positive and encouraging aspects to it. First, the overall tone of the speech was more conciliatory and less combative than previous statements. While we believe that this should have been backed up with real change, it does indicate that the government might be willing to set aside with the brinkmanship of the past and start working closer together with the opposition to achieve real results for Canadians. That is a good sign.

Second, New Democrats welcome the invitation to work with the government on an energy retrofit program, something that we have been calling for and we believe could have a very positive effect on our economy. Also, the mention of the establishment of a continental cap and trade system sounds promising and we look forward to seeing further details.

The Address

Third, the new language around the new world-class research facilities is promising. However, if the government is serious about investing in cutting edge research for the industry, I would suggest that it reconsider its objection to funding the Centre for Excellence in Mining Innovation in Sudbury. Sudbury is a world leader in this field and it is time that the federal government recognizes it as such.

Yet, while these and other items were welcomed, they are still too vague and not enough to counter all that the throne speech does not do.

I will be voting against the throne speech, not out of malice or partisanship. The Speech from the Throne is the government's agenda in broad strokes. While there might not be much detail, it does give an overview of the government's direction and some scope of how it plans to implement its mandate.

To support the throne speech is to support a flawed agenda, one that I do not believe would help Canadian families at this time. Hopefully, our opposition to the throne speech will signal to the government that Canadians need more than vague language; that bold action is needed to help protect the people and communities from this economic downturn.

Canadians are looking to us to work toward protecting their jobs, their savings and their futures. We need to be brave and lay a new foundation for Canada in the 21st century, a foundation not only to get us through this current crisis, but one that will position Canada to be stronger coming out of this troubled time. Some say that cannot be accomplished. However, in the words of the late great Tommy Douglas, "Courage my friends, It is not too late to build a better world".

The people of Sudbury elected me to work hard and tirelessly to ensure that their concerns were met in this Parliament. They can count on me. In these uncertain times, working and middle-class families can count on our team of New Democrat MPs to ensure that their interests come first. That is why Sudbury voted for change. I will not let my constituents down.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague for his question. The Bloc Québécois will also not be supporting this Speech from the Throne because it does not meet Quebec's expectations, particularly with regard to assistance for the manufacturing and forestry industries.

Earlier on, an NDP colleague spoke more specifically about the forestry industry. He spoke about the softwood lumber agreement and denounced the Bloc Québécois for listening to and respecting the unanimous consensus in Quebec. We know that Quebec unions and businesses supported the agreement even though they did not want to. All Quebecers wanted the agreement to be approved and therefore that is what the Bloc Québécois supported.

I would like to know whether my colleague believes that, as representatives of Quebec, we did the right thing when we listened to the people or should we have adopted an ideological stance—as suggested by his colleague—and rejected the demands of the Quebec unions?

[*English*]

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his election.

Sudbury is seen as a mining community and it is important to recognize that forestry jobs also have been lost in Sudbury, a total of 900 jobs. Therefore, I need to be able to explain to families how they will put food on their tables and pay their bills. We need a government that is going to take action on EI reform and action that is going to make differences in the lives of people who are losing their jobs.

Right now what matters is what is important for the people who have the kitchen table problems that we have talked about all along. The partisan stuff I thought we were talking about earlier is working in the spirit of cooperation.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your election and thank the people of London—Fanshawe for putting their trust in me once again. I congratulate the member for Sudbury as well.

I have a question with regard to some of the issues that he has brought forward. We know that Canada and Canadian families are on the edge of a serious economic time. Families are worried. My riding of London—Fanshawe has lost about 1,200 jobs in the last few months. People are frightened. They are hoping they have a government that is willing to invest in communities, child care, affordable housing and pay equity, but they have heard nothing in the Speech from the Throne.

My question for the hon. member is about employment insurance. Over and over again people come to my office. They are desperate because they have been cut off employment insurance or they do not qualify. They are very clear that we need new rules.

Has the member encountered this and would please comment on it?

• (1715)

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we have experienced this in the riding of Sudbury. When a resource-based economy sees this kind of economic downturn, there is tremendous worry in the community about what will happen to all our jobs. When we start seeing plant closures and mines being mothballed, we need to ensure that people can once again pay their mortgages so they do not lose their homes, pay the bills and put food on the table.

We need to look to the government to make the necessary changes on EI reform so people can qualify and ensure that we keep this economy and their lives stable. We need to ensure that they can make their mortgage payments, pay their bills, put food on the table and pay for child care.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member on his election to the House.

We have just come through an election which has triggered the need for us to have a throne speech and a debate, but maybe the starting point is to ask why we had the election. The last Parliament passed a bill setting fixed election dates and it should not have been until October of 2009.

The Address

Would the member agree that the last election was totally unnecessary and we should have been here working on behalf of Canadians.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault: Mr. Speaker, it was time for an election because the Canadian people obviously expressed some change that was needed. The need for that change was throughout northern Ontario because seven of us were now elected to represent northern Ontario. Therefore, yes, it was very much time for that election.

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker,

[Member spoke in Ojibway as follows:]

BooZhoo. Awbinogeeyak. Eekwayuwug. Ininnywug.

[English]

I begin in Ojibway and give greetings in Ojibway to the House because I would like to honour the elders of the many first nations who are in my ridings. I would like to respect those elders and the work that they and their predecessors have done to help build our country. I would like to ask the government today to ensure that our brothers and sisters in the first nations, the Métis and the Inuit are all included in the continuing building of this nation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Pam and our children, Zara, Elizabeth, Liam, Jennifer and Jacob.

I would like to also particularly thank my mentor, my friend and my neighbour, Howard Hampton, the leader of the Ontario New Democrats and all the ONDP.

I would like to thank the member for Toronto—Danforth and my caucus for their support. I would like to thank the federal party for the support, particularly in this last election, that it has shown me.

I would like to thank my friends in broadcasting, particularly Fraser Dougall who gave me my first job on radio.

I would like to thank World University Service of Canada, headquartered in Ottawa, for the six and a half years that I spent overseas as a volunteer and working for the organization.

I would like to thank the elementary school students in the west end of my riding who laughed at my jokes and who listened to my stories of adventures with African wildlife.

I would like to thank the terrific volunteers in my riding for their support, many of whom have been with me for the whole time.

Of course, I would like to thank the people of Thunder Bay—Rainy River who have honoured me with their confidence and their belief that I can help make Thunder Bay—Rainy River a better place to live, a place where no one gets left behind.

It takes more than five hours to drive across my riding. It spans two time zones. It is, bar none, arguably the most beautiful riding in our country. We have Kakabeka Falls, Niagara of the north. We have Quetico Park, the most accessible wilderness park in the country. Little do members know, I am sure, that the Prairies actually begin in the west end of my riding. Our farmers have been hit hard in Stratton, Emo and Bergland, seniors in Rainy River, Morson,

forestry families in Barwick, Fort Frances, Sapawe, Upsala and Thunder Bay and Atikokan, too.

However, I would like the members in the House to know that we have a fighting spirit and that we are willing to work with all levels of government to ensure we have the wherewithal and the tools to make lives better for our families.

People in Thunder Bay—Rainy River are worried about their jobs, their pensions and their savings. We were hoping there would be some bold and strategic moves by the government in the throne speech, but what we have is a throne speech that does not match the urgency and the depth of the problems facing Canadian families.

We have proven again by not supporting this throne speech, just as in the 39th Parliament, that we are the effective opposition in the House.

• (1720)

The Speech from the Throne does not secure jobs for our families. It does not secure and ensure sound budgeting. Just today the parliamentary budget officer announced that we could be facing a \$13.8 billion deficit. Cancelling the scheduled \$7.3 billion in corporate tax cuts in 2009-10 would go a long way to putting Canadians and Canada on a sound financial footing.

However, let me be clear, I want to work with the government. People in my riding have told me that they do not want another election any time soon. They want me to work with the government. We need to ensure that no one gets left behind or no families get left behind.

I was pleased to hear some of the words in the throne speech. I was pleased that I heard, at least two or three times, the term working families. Everyone in the House will recognize where that term came from.

I look forward to working with the government on home retrofit programs. I welcome the language on the new world-class research facilities, reducing gun crime and ending cross-border smuggling of guns. It was in our 2008 election platform.

I have spoken with three ministers so far and I have pledged my co-operation on a broad range of issues. Every educator knows that success breeds success.

I heard this morning, and I heard recently from the hon. Conservative member, that the government finally would get rid of the long gun registry. I am very pleased to tell the House that for eight years, since the turn of the century, my constituents have told me that we need to get rid of that long gun registry. They have told me that it unfairly penalizes farmers, gun collectors and hunters. If that bill appears as a stand-alone bill, I will honour the wishes of the constituents in my riding.

As I said, success breeds success. We can make the government work for all Canadians, where no one gets left behind. Do not let anyone tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it cannot be done.

[Member spoke in Ojibwa]

The Address

[English]

• (1725)

Mr. Bradley Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my hon. friend on his first address to the House and his time here.

As a member of Parliament for Saskatchewan, I was very much interested in his remarks on the long gun registry. As he may know, all provincial parties in Saskatchewan, the provincial Liberals, the provincial NDP and the provincial Saskatchewan Party, have all come out firmly against the long gun registry. As a member of the government party, a member sitting in support of the government, my question to him is very simple.

What can we do as members to help him so that he will find it easier to vote for the repeal of the long gun registry and other members of his caucus will be able to join him in that effort, having spoken with veteran members of that caucus who are also prepared to vote for the repeal of the long gun registry?

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should not try to trick us by putting it in some big omnibus bill or a bunch of other bills that we cannot support.

I will emphasize once again that I have promised the constituents in my riding in their support of getting rid of the long gun registry. Almost to a person they believe that it should be gone. I would like to honour that and I hope the hon. member and other hon. members will help me in that.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I, like others, want to congratulate the member across on his election to Parliament and I wish him all the best.

I want to follow up on the last question about the abolition of the system of gun control that we have in this country, and in particular, the long gun registry. I would ask a very simple question of the member. Is there anyone else in his caucus who supports him on this view?

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, let me be very clear. We are not talking about gun control here. We are talking about the long gun registry.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. John Rafferty: I have to admit I am a little embarrassed by the Conservative support. Let us make that perfectly clear right off the bat.

To answer the hon. member's question directly, I have not spoken to other members of my caucus. I do not know what other members of my caucus feel about this particular issue, but I would like to remind the hon. member and other members of the House that I was elected for two reasons: to take care of the people of my riding through the constituency work that I am doing already and to honour the wishes of the people of my riding and to represent them in Ottawa. That is what I will be doing.

• (1730)

[Translation]

Mr. Serge Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question based on what the member said, which I found

shocking from an NDP member. My question is about the registration of long arms.

Some people here have a lot of sympathy for duck hunters; the topic comes up often. As far as I know, duck hunters drive their cars—which are registered—to hunting locations. They ride in boats—also registered. In civilized countries, it is common to register dangerous objects, especially objects that were designed to kill.

Why would a farmer agree to register his tractor, which is not used to kill anyone, but is still dangerous? But an object that is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River for a brief response.

[English]

Mr. John Rafferty: Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that billions of dollars have been spent on this long gun registry, money that could have been spent hiring border guards, money that could have been spent stopping hand guns coming into this country through mail and through the Internet. The money was ill-placed. It was simply designed as a tax grab that has gone horribly wrong.

Let me—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Cardigan.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a privilege to stand in the House and respond to the Speech from the Throne. It is an honour again to be in this grand chamber, the highest court in the land.

I want to congratulate the Speaker himself on winning the election and I want to thank all the people who were involved in the democratic process in order to show that they fully believe in democracy. It is certainly a great show. We heard some words of wisdom and it is important that the House operates in a proper manner, which I fully believe it does.

I want to thank the people of Cardigan in Prince Edward Island who were kind enough to re-elect me to the House of Commons. It is indeed an honour and a privilege, but I never could have been elected without all the volunteers and campaign managers who worked so hard to make sure I was able to return.

I also want to thank my wife, Frances, and my three daughters, Carolyn, Rita and Lynn, who put up with this. As the numbers speak, as I have indicated, they have small children at home and they are here. It is not that easy, I am well aware of it. The fact is that tomorrow I will have the honour of celebrating 20 years in the House of Commons which is indeed a great honour. I am certainly pleased.

I am here to address some of the serious situations taking place in the riding of Cardigan in eastern Prince Edward Island. In my area of Prince Edward Island there has been a very big problem with rainfall.

Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

The Address

One of the farmers in my area said it was probably his worst year in the potato industry. It is quite a thing to look at crops covered with water. It is more than potato growers. The turnip and carrot growers, and all vegetable growers suffered great loss. The Government of Canada needs to deal with this to make sure these people receive some help.

There is also a lot of blight in the area. A number of farmers told me they had to dump their crops. Being a potato farmer in the agricultural sector most of my life, I understand fully what a devastating thing that can be for people who are involved with this way of making a living. Another farmer indicated it was like the PVYn and the potato war, the whole thing combined, but tripled.

Farmers go through all the problems of growing a crop, taking the chance of covering up hundreds of thousands of dollars, harvesting the crop and possibly even grading the potatoes and tubers in the bag. They grade them and open the bag a week later only to be able to put a thumb into the potato. That means they have spent everything to produce the crop but have lost everything. It is vitally important the government assist those farmers.

I am aware that during the election campaign government members were looking at the situation in Prince Edward Island, but as I indicated previously, there are problems not only with potatoes but with other types of vegetables. I hope the government will look at this and deal with the farmers and be sure it comes up with an assistance program which will keep these people in the agricultural sector.

Another problem is insurance. When money is short, people spend the least amount of dollars on insurance. This is another problem. Now they have this devastating problem with not enough insurance.

On page seven of the Speech from the Throne, which I would hopefully take the government's word, it states that targeted help will be available for those who need it the most. In this situation the potato growers, the turnip growers and the carrot growers need it in Prince Edward Island.

Another problem, in other sectors, if it is a municipal area and the federal government comes in it can be about 90% federal assistance and 10% provincial assistance. When it is agricultural, the split is sixty-forty.

● (1735)

I come from Prince Edward Island, which is certainly not the wealthiest area in the country, but we produce some of the best potatoes grown in the world. We need help.

I also heard a number of times in the House and in other areas that we have to make sure everything is good from the gate to the plate, and I understand fully what that means. There is no problem at the plate. The products produced by the agricultural community in this country are second to none but we have to make sure that it can stay in business, and that is what I want to emphasize.

Crop insurance will be about ten times what it was in other years. I have written to the minister and again today I am pleading with the government to make sure that we come up with a package that would help good farmers who only want to work and make a living, and produce a top quality product and stay in the business.

A meeting of the leaders of the G-20, including the Prime Minister, was held in Washington on November 15. I well agree that he should have been there. This is an issue that has to be addressed. It appears to me that the minister agreed to reach an agreement that this year would lead to a successful conclusion to the WTO's Doha development agenda as stated in the Declaration of the Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy. I quote from page 4, section 13, involving trade:

Further, we shall strive to reach agreement this year on modalities that leads to a successful conclusion to the WTO's Doha Development Agenda with an ambitious and balanced outcome.

I can assure the House that I want an ambitious and balanced outcome.

The problem with the WTO Doha round was the fact that 152 countries sat down and made decisions. They evaluated what took place in different countries. They looked at programs. These countries evaluated whether programs were acceptable or not with a green light meaning a program was acceptable, an amber light meaning it was questionable, and a red light meaning it was totally unacceptable.

In November of last year a draft report was issued by the WTO through the Doha round. It indicated quite clearly that under the red light agreement was wharf repair under small craft harbours, employment insurance for fishermen, the elimination of the capital gains tax for fishermen, and even the elimination of the tax card that they use when they buy equipment for their boat or for their traps or whatever.

This is totally unacceptable. I know we are in a time of crisis. I know that things have to be done. I also know that three years ago we were sitting around here with a \$13 billion surplus and now we are sitting here talking about eliminating employment insurance for fishermen. We are talking about ending small craft harbour repairs. We are talking about taking the capital gains tax exemption away from the fishermen whom I and many others around this place worked so hard to make sure was available for fishermen.

I want to see changes made, but I want to make sure that members on the opposite side of the House are fully aware of what is in this agreement. The fact is if this is allowed to happen, it will destroy an industry in the Atlantic region.

I also want to indicate that the Harper government has threatened the public service with legislation and it is going to force settlements. Public servants in my area in Prince Edward Island and across this country are—

● (1740)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member well knows that he cannot use the names of members in the House in any of his comments. He has been here a long time and maybe he gets rather forgetful from time to time, but I do suggest that he play by the rules.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I appreciate that assistance and I am sure that the hon. member will not do it again.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Speaker, I will not do it again, but I hope my hon. colleague who was so observant will listen to what I have to say.

The Address

I hope that when he talks to his colleagues in cabinet, he will persuade them of the need to watch the fisheries programs and the need to watch the agricultural sector. If they do not do that, we will not have either in the area I represent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my hon. colleague from Prince Edward Island.

In 1977, under the René Lévesque government in Quebec, the Abenakis, Algonquin, Attikamek, Cree, Huron-Wendat, Innu, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Mohawk, Naskapis and Inuit were allowed to have schools taught in their language for the first time ever. This is very important for the preservation of the culture of many such nations that deserve our respect and that, for the first time, had a government that would listen. In fact, it was a sovereignist government in Quebec.

I would like to know how the member sees the Speech from the Throne meeting the needs of first nations people in Quebec and in Canada, who have, for quite some time—for over ten years—been asking the federal government to invest in first nations schools, to put them on a level playing field with other schools across Canada? How does he see this throne speech helping first nations?

[*English*]

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Speaker, I have been here for quite a number of years and I understand quite clearly what he is talking about. As far as first nations are concerned, not only the schools but many other things need a lot more attention. Whether it is policing, the jail system, the correctional system, whatever, there are many things that need to be addressed for the first nations people. I can assure the member that I support that.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like the member for Cardigan, I represent a rural riding that has both fishing and agriculture and I realize the problems.

If we look at the outcome of the last election, virtually west of the Maritimes the representation of Liberal members in rural areas was almost wiped out across the rest of the country. I am wondering if he can explain why the Liberals would bring forward such regressive policies, such as a carbon tax. A carbon tax would penalize agriculture producers from one end of this country to the other because of increased input costs not only for fuel but it would also dramatically drive up the cost of fertilizers. It would make it impossible for anyone to make a living.

I hope he is not being hypocritical in saying that we have to stand up for our farmers and develop programs and policies that work only to turn around and introduce taxes that would be regressive and would drive farmers out of profitability and into a situation where they absolutely could not make a living in rural areas. I want him to talk about that.

• (1745)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Speaker, if the member for Selkirk—Interlake really evaluated the green shift, he would find out that there were many programs for the agricultural sector in it. He knows that very well. He knows that a number of things will have to be implemented if we are going to live on this planet.

What I was trying to explain to my hon. colleague and others is that there are problems right now with dollars and cents for farmers who are in desperate financial situations. Now is the time for the Government of Canada to come forward and make sure that these good producers are able to stay in business.

My hon. colleague said that there are fishermen in his riding. I say with all honesty and earnestness that he should please look at what is going on. I would ask him to please talk to his colleagues about what they are proposing. Please do not let them take away the programs that are necessary for the fishery to survive.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Hon. members know that this is my first time in the chair. I am going to have to memorize all the riding names. The first one I have memorized is Mississauga South.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member indeed has been an hon. member for a number of years and has served his riding very well.

The throne speech includes a statement at the top of page 15 in which the government comments on respect for the institutions of Canada. In particular, I recall that in this place there was a confidence vote on Elections Canada and the Conservative Party voted non-confidence unanimously in Elections Canada because of the electoral problems.

I wonder if the member would care to comment on other examples where the government in fact has not shown support for the institutions of Canada.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Speaker, I have a quick answer for my hon. colleague, the member for Mississauga South. Worldwide when there is a problem with democracy, whom do they consult? Elections Canada. Whom do they want to take care of the situation? Elections Canada. The Government of Canada is suing Elections Canada. It is a sad thing.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your re-election, not that I question the wisdom of the good people of Haliburton, but nevertheless, congratulations in any event.

I want to also thank the people of Scarborough—Guildwood for their kindness and generosity in re-electing me for the fifth time in 11 years. I too might question their wisdom. Nevertheless, it is indeed an honour and a privilege to serve in this place.

Unfortunately the Speech from the Throne is more of the same old, same old. Having mismanaged the nation's finances for the last two and half years, the Prime Minister is now begging for forgiveness.

We have gone from a position of 10 years of Liberal surpluses and in two and a half short years the Conservative government has now managed to achieve a deficit. The warnings and the advice of the Liberal Party of Canada fell on deaf ears and we are now facing an exaggerated form of economic turmoil in a greatly weakened position because of the actions of the government. Ten years of Liberal prudence has been thrown out in two years by the Conservatives. In fact, the Parliamentary Budget Officer is correct in saying that we are staring down the barrel of many deficits to come.

The Address

The first part of the Speech from the Throne recites many accomplishments, many Liberal achievements over the previous years, Liberal achievements without attribution, may I say.

The Prime Minister, I know, is fond of plagiarism, but even this plagiarism is on a grand scale. Paying down the debt, investments in health and education, controlling spending, and a sound public pension plan were inheritances of the Martin and Chrétien governments. It would have been nice, although not expected, had the Prime Minister at least attributed to Messrs. Chrétien and Martin those accomplishments.

Not only does he claim credit without attribution, but he also announces in the Speech from the Throne that he is meeting the premiers. Last month when the Leader of the Opposition suggested such a thing, he was ridiculed for even suggesting it, that somehow the Leader of the Opposition was being panicky and was fearmongering. Now the Prime Minister thinks it is such a keen idea that he even put it in the Speech from the Throne. Possibly the Prime Minister was being just a touch economical with the truth when he neglected to mention that Canada in the first two quarters was actually running a deficit and that his government was already running a deficit during the election. His Minister of Finance, in an interview with Peter Mansbridge on CBC, said, "I am not going to be the minister of deficits". In a direct response to Peter Mansbridge he said that he could not imagine any circumstance in which the Government of Canada would go into deficit.

When we read in the Speech from the Throne that it would be misguided to commit to a balanced budget in the short term at any cost, in Scarborough—Guildwood they call those weasel words.

This may have something to do with the great axiom of John Crosbie. John Crosbie was obviously not in our party but he had quite a number of great sayings, one of which was, "If I told you what I was going to do, you would never vote for me". That is probably true of the Minister of Finance; if, during the election, he told people what he was going to do, they would never vote for him. The Minister of Finance is supposed to be on top of the nation's finances. His department tracks GDP, revenue and expenditures literally on a day by day basis. He either knew the government was facing a deficit, or he should have known the government was facing a deficit. Again, as the chief financial officer of the nation, either he is being economical with the truth or he is just plain incompetent.

The Prime Minister has nowhere to hide. The Parliamentary Budget Officer was quoted in the media as saying:

The weak fiscal performance to date is largely attributable to previous policy decisions as opposed to weakened economic conditions...

• (1750)

There is no hiding behind the G-20, no hiding behind the mess in the United States. It is due to the policies of the government. An article in the media states:

Page concluded Ottawa could run a deficit as high as \$13.8 billion next year, in 2009-10. Deficits could remain higher than \$11 billion each year through to 2013, adding nearly \$50-billion to Canada's debt over the next five years.

Fifty billion dollars is a lot of money, even for Conservatives. Fifty billion dollars would be added to the national debt because of the incompetence and mismanagement of this nation's finances, in spite of the advice of the Liberal Party of Canada.

The Speech from the Throne announces that the Conservatives now have religion and they are going to experiment with responsible fiscal management, after having run expenses for the past two and a half years at something in the order of 6% to 8% on an annualized basis for a total of \$40 billion. Now they have religion and they are going to try responsible fiscal management.

The Prime Minister is going to be disciplined. Is that not a novel idea. I wonder by what standard he is going to be disciplined. Is he going to be disciplined by the standard of GDP growth? Is he going to be disciplined by the standard of inflation? Is he going to be disciplined by the standard of people's wages? Or is it that Canadians are getting disciplined because of the lack of self-discipline on the part of the Prime Minister?

Apparently, the Prime Minister is going to be fiscally disciplined without touching the major expenditures of the government. He is going to be fiscally disciplined without touching transfers. He is going to be fiscally disciplined without touching program expenses. Magically somehow the nation's finances are going to right themselves without touching either program expenditures or transfers.

On page six of the throne speech, and I hope no one missed this, the Prime Minister has dragged out the favourite whipping boy, which is the civil service. He has announced a new war on the civil service, and somehow that is going to be the answer to his lack of fiscal discipline over the past two and a half years.

On the other hand, we could take the approach of the Minister of Finance, which is to sell off government assets at distressed prices. We in Ontario have seen this movie before. Prior to one election, Mr. Harris decided to sell off Highway 407, a very valuable asset of the people of Ontario and the GTA. The consequence was that he sold it for about 25% of its value. The new owners of Highway 407 flipped the property two or three years later and pocketed a tidy sum of money. The consequence of the consequence is that we have virtually institutionalized gridlock in the GTA. That is what the people of Canada have in store for themselves as the Conservative government flip-flops its way around trying to figure out what to do.

The Conservatives do not even have discipline on the revenue side. Against the advice of every economist in the nation, they have reduced their revenues to the point where the cupboard is bare. Well, who emptied the cupboard? According to Mr. Page, "The weak fiscal performance to date is largely attributable to previous policy decisions as opposed to weakened economic conditions, since nominal GDP is higher than expected in budget 2008".

That means Canadians are working. They are working harder and harder, and the government is squandering their hard-earned money. Having exacerbated the difficulties we are facing due to economic turmoil, the Prime Minister gives Canadians the advice that these are great buying opportunities. He gave that advice on October 7. How much has the market melted down since then? By 13%, and when I looked at 2 o'clock today, it had dropped another 447 points. We should not take advice from the Prime Minister on running the nation's finances. He could not even run a portfolio. Now he wants to share in the pain. He wants our ideas. This is after two and a half years of ridiculing the Leader of the Opposition. Now he wants our ideas.

The Address

• (1755)

Maybe we could start with a little less ridicule and a little more respect.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our art shapes our identity as a nation and is part of the soul of a people. It inspires, heals and helps to review what brings us together and reflects on what divides us.

As a country, we must give artists better financial support, better funding and better tax relief. We must strengthen rules for Canadian content and support public broadcasting with stable funding.

Yet in the throne speech there is no restoration of funding to arts and culture. There is no financial support to artists. We know that as a country, we need a striving arts and culture industry with artists who can imagine a better world and reflect it back to us.

Just a few weeks ago, during the election, the member and his party were totally opposed to the cuts to funding for arts and culture. How could the member and his party support the Conservative government's plan to cut arts funding? How could they vote for the throne speech? I just do not understand.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I frankly do not know where that question came from. There is a remote possibility we were in the same election.

The Liberal Party's position was that the funding cuts to the arts proposed by the government were ill-advised and ill-conceived. Had the hon. member read the Speech from the Throne, she would have noted as well that all the things actually producing revenues in this country, i.e. tourism, small business and things of that nature, have until recently not been doing badly and have been generating GDP for the nation.

The real difficulties are in some of the major areas, those being finance and auto.

The arts community actually produces a great deal of GDP for this nation and should be supported, along with tourism and small business. That is the position of the Liberal Party.

• (1800)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberal government came to office in 1993, it was faced with a \$42 billion deficit. It had to go through a very important process, which was basically to stabilize the situation.

There was expenditure review. There were some very difficult decisions to be made. Some very important tactical solutions were made to stabilize the situation. It took three years to balance the budget.

I read in today's *Ottawa Citizen* about the President of the Treasury Board basically cutting off negotiations with all the public service unions. Penalizing our public service will now summarily start, it appears, suggesting somehow that the public service is the reason we are in this predicament, while that does not seem to be the case.

Maybe the member would like to comment on the public service—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party of Canada is the party of Manley, Chrétien and Martin. It is the party that has seen economic turmoil in the past and the party that has been able to deal with the nation's finances in a prudent and reasonable way. It has not, in the 10 years prior to the present government's coming to office, gone into deficit. In fact, we have run surpluses.

As the hon. member rightly said, it took us three years to dig out from the previous Conservative mess in order to right the ship of state. At the same time, we did not take it out on the civil servants.

Every program has to be subject to expenditure review, except that this government does not seem to be interested in dealing with program spending and it does not seem to be interested in dealing with transfers. It seems to be interested only in beating the civil service over the head with a two-by-four. That is no way to run a government.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on his re-election to the House.

I am wondering if the hon. member would comment on two different things.

First, Ontarians remember something they fondly, or not so fondly, recall as "Rae days". I know the hon. member has some commentary on the politics of Ontario.

The second issue I would bring to the hon. member's attention or recollection is the fact that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, a short answer, please.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I have a pithy response to the hon. member's improper suggestion of using names, but in the event that you were not listening, Mr. Speaker, I would say, better Rae days than Harper years.

The government has no idea what to do in a situation of fiscal discipline. It has no—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad I am speaking after the hon. member. I can set the record straight on what he was talking about.

I would like to thank my family, my spouse, Neena, my daughters, Priti and Kajol, my son, Aman, my son-in-law, Robin, my grandson, Devon Obhrai Martin, and my granddaughter, Evasha Raina Obhrai Martin, who campaigned to have me re-elected. I had a great team, Ken Walker, the official agent, Doug Page, Laxmi Saberwal, Akshay Anand, Rita Obhrai, and my mother, Asha Obhrai, who helped and encouraged the volunteers who worked very hard. Finally, I want to thank all the voters of Calgary East for electing me for the fifth time.

The Address

Even if it is for the fifth time, it is a very humbling experience on the night the people elect us to represent them in this wonderful House here. It is an honour and a privilege, and I am very thankful that my constituents have allowed me the opportunity to come to this House and speak. Not only that, but as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I have had the opportunity to represent Canada overseas, so I sincerely want to thank them very much.

When I was campaigning in my riding, my constituents of Calgary East brought up three primary issues which were of concern to them.

One of their main concerns was the growing residential crime rate in Calgary, specifically in my riding, all related to gun violence, all related to gang and drug wars. Calgary is one of the fastest growing cities in Canada. As it grows, its affluence has attracted a lot of people who are involved in gangs and drugs. This has raised a lot of concerns with longtime residents. I heard it time after time when I was knocking on doors that this was one of their major concerns. I am very happy to say that the government and the Prime Minister have made a clear commitment to strengthen the key areas such as youth crime, organized crime and gang violence.

Canadians need to be reassured that they are safe in their homes and communities. Citizens need to know that justice is served and that it is served swiftly. Our government under the Prime Minister will take tough action against crime and will work with our partners to improve the administration of justice. Serious offences will meet with serious penalties.

The safety and the security of Canadians is our utmost priority. As such, we will continue moving forward on our tackling crime agenda. In case people did not notice, the Prime Minister has appointed two parliamentary secretaries for justice because he views this as one of the key areas that needs to be addressed to ensure that Canadians feel safe in their homes.

The government has already taken significant action to better protect Canadians from those who would commit serious crimes and to strengthen the capacity of the criminal justice system. The government is committed to protecting Canadians from the violence of gangs and guns and organized criminal activity, as well as to helping youth make good choices while protecting communities from young people who pose a danger to society. This was re-emphasized today when the Prime Minister gave his speech in reply to the Speech from the Throne.

● (1805)

The second point I heard on the doorsteps while I was campaigning was from seniors. Seniors told me that they feel the crunch. Those who are on fixed incomes see the rising prices of fuel as well as the rising prices of food which in turn creates a pressure on the day-to-day necessities. As we know, Calgary is a booming city. I am told there is a lot of pressure with the cost of housing going up and this has all had an impact on seniors. Seniors, understandably, were very much concerned when I talked with them.

Let me say that the government has taken important steps to improve the financial security of seniors and pensioners. Last year, the government provided close to \$5 billion in tax relief for seniors and pensioners. The government doubled the pension income

amount, increased the age limit for maturing pension and registered retirement savings plans from 69 to 71, and introduced pension income splitting for seniors and pensioners. In budget 2008, we increased the guaranteed income supplement exemption to \$3,500 from \$500 to benefit low and modest income seniors who choose to continue working.

We have received on many occasions, and we continue to receive, calls with regard to transferring RRSPs into RRIFs. This is of course due to the downturn in the global economy. People think their assets have depreciated and seniors are rightly concerned. However, let me remind all seniors and everyone here that there is no requirement in the income tax rules for an individual to sell assets to make RRIF minimum withdrawals. If the individual's financial institution is set up to do so, it can transfer particular assets, such as shares, from the RRIF into another type of investment account in the name of the individual without selling assets.

This is, again, one of the many steps that our government has taken to reassure seniors that it is concerned about the welfare of seniors. Not only that, but the Prime Minister has a dedicated minister looking after seniors' issues and that minister, who is in the Senate, has done a fabulous job of looking after seniors. This is to reassure seniors that we do take their concerns and their welfare very seriously.

Now we come to the main point of the throne speech, and this is of concern to my constituents: the global economic slowdown.

We hear the Liberals talking about whether there is a deficit, but they need to understand that at this given time people are losing their jobs, there is uncertainty and assets are being depreciated. That is why the G-20 met in Washington. The G-20 came out with recommendations as to how to help the global economy recover. That recovery is critical for Canada. Canada is not an isolated country. We are part of the global system.

We also heard from the Prime Minister and others that we are seeking ways to further increase free trade agreements with the European Union, Peru and other countries which would bring Canada more into the global economy.

Therefore, the impacts from the global economy will have an effect here in Canada. We are not isolated. The prices of commodities have gone down because world usage has done down. However, while one sector is going down, there are other sectors that are benefiting.

We are very fortunate. This country of ours has vast reserves of all kinds that can help us stay balanced, so that where one sector goes down another sector goes up. However, this whole talk requires action and as the Prime Minister said, last year action was taken. That is why we are not feeling the strong effects that are being felt in the United States and Japan, both of which are now in an official recession. We are not in a recession here because the government rose to the occasion with the finance minister when it was required.

● (1810)

When the last speaker talked about Highway 407 and other things, he failed to understand the steps this government has taken to ensure that Canadians do not suffer greatly from the economic slowdown.

The Address

While we hear the U.S. and European Union coming out and supporting their banks with massive loans, the Government of Canada, with its policies, has yet to give any money to the banks for bailouts. The Canadian banks are strong. We have not given any bailouts.

It is an important point to consider, that our economic fundamentals are sound, but the clouds are out there and are coming in. That is what the Prime Minister said in his speech.

During the election campaign, Canadians said the best person to manage the economy was our Prime Minister. They have all the confidence in our Prime Minister, not the Liberal Party that wanted to put in a carbon tax and talked about taxing people. Then the Liberals were saying it was going to be revenue neutral and there were going to be tax breaks. When did taxes become revenue neutral? We know from past experience, no taxes are neutral. There was the GST with promises to cut it. Now they want to increase it.

One of the most interesting factors of this campaign was that the Green Party, the NDP and the Liberals wanted to raise taxes, the GST and everything else. However, the clouds are looming and there is going to be a recession. There are signs of a tough economic slowdown coming and we have parties that want to raise taxes.

Canadians have confidence in the Prime Minister and have re-elected us to the House as the government. All of us are thankful for that.

People in my riding are concerned. They call us asking if they are going to be affected. The riding that I represent in east Calgary is the industrial hub of Calgary. Blue collar workers live there and they are all concerned about the economy.

The U.S.A. is our largest trading partner and any recession there will have an impact on us. That is a foregone conclusion. We see this happening in the auto industry and other sectors.

People in my riding are concerned about that. I can assure them that the government is taking steps to ensure the world economic downturn does not impact us, or if it does impact us, that its impact is minimal. The throne speech is all about giving confidence.

We will continue doing that despite the Liberal rhetoric about going into a deficit. Instead of talking about the deficit, what is more important is seeing what we can do to stop the global slowdown affecting Canadians. That was the intention of the G-20, which has come to an agreement, and we are part of the G-20.

We will not talk about the NDP members because they never liked free trade.

How can the Liberals expect us not to be part of the G-20? They expect us to be coming up with our own policy, forgetting that we are part of the world economy? I do not understand that.

Canada is part of the G-20 and part of the G-8. We have to work with our partners to ensure we bring the economic downturn back into an upswing very quickly. That is what is important. They have an answer. That is what we are going to do.

● (1815)

I do not understand what the Liberals are worried about. They should be worried about jobs. The Prime Minister asked them to give suggestions on how we can improve the economy. They have given no suggestions. They just keep saying that it is the government's responsibility. They say that we do not want to go into deficit, that we do not want to do this or that but they give no suggestions. If they cannot make suggestions they should not criticize. We need to get on with the business of running this country and ensuring that Canadians feel their government is standing up for them.

The Liberals keep talking about the surplus they had when they were in power. Today the Minister of Finance said that the Liberals were the biggest spenders. If we were to look at the spending graph we would see how it went up and up. We will not take any lessons from that party on how to run this country. We will run this country the way the Prime Minister said, which is in a prudent, conservative way to ensure that Canadians feel the economic downturn is in order and the consequence of that. That is what this government will do and that is what the Speech from the Throne is all about. The Speech from the Throne was well received in my riding. People feel confident that we will continue handling this as the Prime Minister said.

● (1820)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the member on his re-election. It is good to see him back in the House. I always enjoy listening to his speeches.

One of the things that surprises me about the government's Speech from the Throne is the fact that it almost completely ignores the arts and culture sector. One sentence, probably the vaguest sentence of the entire Speech from the Throne, talks about arts and culture. Given the disastrous campaign the Conservatives had when it came to arts and culture issues, I would have thought there would be a post-mortem of the campaign somewhere in the Conservative caucus which highlighted the fact that the Conservatives really needed to get their act together when it came to this important sector of our economy.

I think the Conservatives probably now know that over one million Canadians, directly or indirectly, earn their living in the arts and cultural sector, that over \$85 billion is related to that sector and that 7.5% of our GDP is related to the arts sector and yet during the campaign the Prime Minister was incredibly dismissive of the work of cultural workers in this country, incredibly dismissive of that industry.

We also saw the previous government denigrate arts and culture by trying to impose censorship measures, giving the minister an opportunity to do that in Bill C-10. We saw the cancellation of important overseas cultural programs, the ProMart program and the trade routes program. We saw the government refusing to ensure that the CBC had enough money to ensure the continuation of the CBC Radio orchestra.

There was nothing in the Speech from the Throne to undo those measures. Why is the government continuing to ignore the arts and cultural sector, an important part of Canada's economy and the life of Canadians?

The Address

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, we are not ignoring the arts and cultural sector. We understand its importance to Canada. I would disagree with the member saying that this government is against arts and culture. We are supporting arts and culture and will continue to do so.

I do not know what the member was talking about when he talked about the disastrous campaign. He was on this side and now he is sitting on that side. If it had been a disastrous campaign he would be on this side. The numbers have shrunk on that side, so I do not know what disaster he is talking about.

However, let us talk about what is important. Arts and culture are extremely important. An economic downturn is taking place and this government needs to ensure the effect of an economic downturn on Canadian families is as minimal as possible. That is what the throne speech is all about. That is what responsible governments do and that is what we are doing.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to talk about my colleague's speech, but I have something very important to say.

My colleague addressed himself directly to a member numerous times, which should not happen.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, you gave the floor to a colleague from the New Democratic Party before giving it to a Liberal or Bloc Québécois colleague. That should not happen either.

I know that you have just begun and that you are acting in good faith, but it is important to start out on the right foot.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I thank the hon. member for that advice. I am trying to move the questioners around the room in a spirit of decorum.

Questions and comments. The hon. member for Gatineau.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we heard the throne speech, we read it, and already the government is taking a big stick to the federal public service.

I would like to know how my colleague feels about rumours that the federal government is not negotiating in good faith with the federal public service. The throne speech suggested that the government wants to pass a bill without holding good-faith negotiations between the employees—public servants—and the employer—the federal government. Both the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada and the Public Service Alliance of Canada have talked about this. That is a pretty poor way to treat public servants.

Do the Conservatives really intend not to negotiate in good faith with public service employees?

• (1825)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): During the parliamentary secretary's last response I was distracted and did not

hear whether he was speaking through the Chair but I am sure he will this time.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: I certainly will, Mr. Speaker. I am very happy to see you in that chair.

Canada's public servants are doing an excellent job. We have a very high degree of respect for them. They are some of the most professional around the world who command a huge amount of respect not only in Canada but all around the world. Let me be very clear that this government respects our public servants in the way they are running this country.

As to the other issue with respect to the negotiations and everything, these negotiations always take place among both employers and employees and will continue to do so. The government will take into account its situation and unions will take into account their situation. These are ongoing trade talks that are part of the labour movement and are part of negotiations in Canada.

I will say again that this government respects Canada's public servants.

Mrs. Bonnie Crombie (Mississauga—Streetsville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the voters of Mississauga—Streetsville for their support. I promised them that I would restore trust and I have already begun to do so.

The fundamentals of our economy are not strong. The global situation has only been exacerbated by the fiscal mismanagement and failed policies of the Conservative government. It burned through the \$3 billion contingency fund. It squandered \$13 billion. The Conservatives have proven that they are poor fiscal managers.

Two hundred thousand jobs have been lost in the manufacturing sector. There has been a loss of business and consumer confidence. Canada has the slowest growth rate in the G-8, the lowest productivity in 18 years and yet the government increased spending 13.8% in the past two years.

Today alone the TSX dropped 9%, 765 points. That is a five year low. It is the second largest drop in history. Oil is now below \$50. Every commodity price is down.

Will the government pledge to protect seniors on fixed incomes, jobs in the manufacturing sector, working families and new Canadians? Will the Conservatives reverse their dangerous policies?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, that was quite interesting. I am glad she is here to restore trust because it is that party that requires trust as a result of the sponsorship scandal. She just needs to tell her colleagues about the sponsorship scandal and bring that trust back.

The member said that the price of oil was down to \$50. Is it our fault that the price of oil has gone down to \$50? I do not know if the member realizes that there is a global meltdown going on. There is a global crisis going on and Canada is working with other countries to reach a solution to this problem.

The Address

We will continue to be part of the G-20. We will work toward reassuring Canadians that the global economic uncertainty will not have a major effect on Canada. We will continue to do that, which is what the throne speech is all about.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 6:30 p.m., this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:30 p.m.)

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